Bridges Over Barriers
in My Life with Autism
Andrew Bloomfield

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Friends of Andrew Bloomfield and
Guelph Services for the Autistic.

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In memory of
my beloved twin sister and best friend
who shared hopes for our futures
and showed the way to my good life

Victoria Bloomfield
1968-1996

You don't need to carry me over the bridge
...just walk by my side...

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Foreword

I expect many people will be inspired by this short memoir. There are many things reported here by which to be inspired. For me, this is a story about the danger of appearances, and about how important it is to anyone's quality of life to know that you're taken seriously (as a person, so to speak). But this book has also taught me lessons about the power of the ability to communicate.

This memoir reports many of the important events of Andrew Bloomfield's life. Most of these are the sorts of things that might show up in the catalogue of highlights, tragedies and turning points of anyone's life: a new home, the death of a beloved sister, meeting people who go on to be important to you. What separates this story from others is the way it traces the author's journey towards mastery of alternative modes of communication. It would be hard not to be moved by the surprise of his family and friends as Andrew revealed previously hidden abilities and began to express thoughts of an unexpected degree of complexity and depth. But I think everyone can learn something important from the way his acquiring increasingly sophisticated abilities to communicate was not only a way for others to make discoveries about Andrew, but was also a source of self-discovery, the vehicle for his personal development, and the key to his taking control of his own life.

Whether we see it happen to someone we know or to someone in a book or movie, most of us have imagined the horror of a certain kind of sudden paralysis---being locked in a body, perhaps by a stroke, aware of what is happening, able to think clearly, but unable to get those thoughts out. Andrew's increasing mastery of supported typing is naturally regarded as a sort of stroke in reverse. I found myself very affected by his description of the frustrations of well-intentioned attempts to have him "communicate" by, for instance, pointing at pictures, and the consequent limitation to one word sentences.

But this account also makes clear that the opportunity to make more sophisticated use of language has played a key role in "changing Andrew's mind" in a most literal sense. Being able to express his thoughts to others in proper sentences has given him the ability to carry on conversations (even if in slow motion). Think of the roads this opens up that we who "speak with our voices" take for granted. It opens up the chance to ask for more information when we're puzzled or interested. It makes it possible to make choices about important and complicated matters because (among other things) one can discuss the implications of various options, expressed hedged answers, and consider options that get beyond "yes" or "no". It makes deeper, more satisfying human relationships possible---for who can imagine a true friendship without the ability to joke, to chat, to agree and disagree? There is

admirable self-awareness in the way this memoir clarifies that such changes have made it possible for Andrew to *express* things he could not even have *thought* before learning to type. Andrew has better grounds than most of us to see the wisdom in the quip often attributed to E.M. Forster: How can I know what I think until I see what I say?

I am afraid that I may be making it sound as though the value of this book is entirely academic or scientific. It's not. As with all good memoirs, much of the value comes from the way it lets us get to know an interesting person. Some who read it will already be acquainted with Andrew. Even many of his friends will be surprised by what they find out here, both in terms of the range of his interests and the depth of his thinking, for the simple reason that most of the time Andrew is not in a position to express his thoughts. Visitors mostly have access only to his most basic thoughts, the one word sentences that so frustrated him when they were all he had available even at the best of times in his early years.

Other readers won't know Andrew at all until they read the book. For them, the book is valuable for the insight it provides into the inner life of a man with autism, and in particular an autistic person who until recently did not "speak." The care with which the author and editor have ensured that the words are Andrew's own makes it particularly revealing. This is a smart guy--- as the memoir makes clear, even that fact would surprise many

who have met Andrew and only seen a man who does not speak and who sometimes behaves in ways that strike them as odd. He's also diplomatic, has many interests, and says some startling things (e.g. about wanting to show that people are wrong to think that people with autism do not feel empathy). But this much would have been clear even in an "as told to" memoir, where someone else put the thoughts into their own version of smooth prose. The prose here is in some places raw, in most places simply a bit different from how most people write. But often *how* a thought is expressed is more interesting than *what* is expressed. Andrew is obviously working hard to figure out how we non-autistic people work. By showing us *how* he thinks about the world, and not only what he thinks about it, this book gives us a way to try to understand him, to really get to know him, too.

I've obviously latched onto only one part of what is described in this memoir. Others will find other things of more consequence. The reason I focus on the development of new language skills is that I think it has implications for those of us who want to support people with disabilities, to help them lead rewarding and satisfying lives. The memoir makes clear that being safe and "well looked after" is not enough. People who do not communicate in the usual ways are likely to be systematically underestimated. They will often surprise us if we invest the effort to find alternative modes of communication that match their individual needs,

and will be able to develop to their potential. This is an important step if we want them to be able to form truly reciprocal relationships with other people and to take more control of their own lives. The work that Andrew and his family, together with supportive professionals and friends, put into making this come true for him is an inspiration. It shows that it can be done, and gives us fair warning that it takes some hard work---sometimes fighting against well-meaning but ill-informed people in positions of power. For Andrew's family, Andrew's good life, in which he makes important decisions for himself and has good friends, including his Bridges-Over-Barriers friends, is the reward for their work. If we set to work, maybe more of us can have similar rewards from helping others achieve similarly good lives.

Dr David DeVidi
Professor of Philosophy
University of Waterloo
September 2011

Editor's preface

This book is almost entirely in Andrew's words which he composed and typed into a computer using WriteOutloud® software. He explains the process in the Introduction and Chapter 5.3. The topics and emphases in this memoir are all his. The only exceptions to Andrew's own words are the foreword, this preface, some editorial footnotes, the index and references to other publications by or about Andrew.

Abbreviations of most people's names are used, partly for ease of composition but mainly for confidentiality. Members of Andrew's family are:
G for Gerald Bloomfield, Andrew's father,
E for Elizabeth Bloomfield, Andrew's mother,
V for Victoria Bloomfield, Andrew's twin sister who died in February 1996.

Beth Komito-Gottlieb (B) and Judi Henry (J) are experienced communication facilitators who have provided physical support for Andrew to type his recollections and reflections.

Facts about Andrew's life

Birth: 6 May 1968, in Auckland, New Zealand with twin sister Anne Victoria, to parents Elizabeth and Gerald Bloomfield. Elizabeth had been born and raised in Fiji, while Gerald is English. They met at the University of Auckland.

Arrival in Canada: 3 January 1969, settling in Guelph, Ontario which has been the family home ever since. Andrew's autism has anchored the family there, and he wants Guelph to be his home forever. Perhaps his attachment to Guelph reflects his having been in distant residential programs for more than half his life by the time he was 27.

Diagnosis and Services: Andrew's differences from his twin were clear from when he was 14 months old, but formal diagnosis and services took much longer. Eventually Andrew was diagnosed with "classic autism" (now called Autistic Disorder) at the Hospital for Sick Children when he was just over four years old.

The lack of local services meant Andrew and family had to travel quite long distances from home. In one sense, he was fortunate to be accepted into what were then rare "start-of-the art" programs for children and youth with autism in Ontario. Andrew himself did not see these as blessings when he had to live away from home, though in his memoir he says that he learned important lessons from these experiences.

- April 1973-November 1974, House 17 (Autistic program) at the Thistletown Regional Centre, Rexdale, Toronto.
- February 1975-November 1980: Autistic Class in Guelph, with summer residential programs in 1975 and 1976 offered by the

Integra Foundation (and the nucleus of what later became The Geneva Centre for Autism).

- December 1980-October 1989: Kerry's Place Adolescent Program, first at Clarksburg, later at Maple.

From the age of 21, Andrew lived for 18 months in a new group home in southwestern Ontario but had to be rescued after a bad reaction to medication. As there were still no appropriate services in Guelph, he was for nearly five years a temporary resident of the Schedule 1 institution Midwestern Regional Centre (MRC), near Palmerston. These years were very hard. But they also saw some important innovations during his times at home. One was Andrew's success in relating to and caring for his dog. Another was being introduced to expressing his needs and thoughts with Augmentative and Alternative Communication, notably using Supported Typing (S-T).

In his memoir, Andrew tells us how important his twin sister was in his learning to cope in what sometimes seemed an alien world. From age 17 to 26, Andrew particularly rejoiced in traveling, learning and communicating with Victoria. He was devastated by her death in a winter traffic accident in February 1996.

Since 1996, Andrew's family and friends have rallied round to support the good whole life that is designed by and around him and based in his own

Guelph home. Friends are highly important in Andrew's life, as he and his parents have few relations anywhere and none at all in North America. Highlights of these years, which have also helped other adults with special needs, are:

- Growing into a whole person-directed life
- Creating a home of his own, guaranteed by a housing trust, Guelph Services for the Autistic (GSA).
- Inventing a self-directed support corporation or Aroha entity, Friends of Andrew Bloomfield (FAB). to be the core of a circle of friends and a safeguard for a continuing good life
- Nutritional and related strategies to overcome severe health problems
- Developing communication and supported decision-making abilities
- Using words and images to express his personality, sensory perceptions and spirituality
- Outdoor life and care for the environment
- Making friends and contributing to his community, including the communication support group Bridges-Over-Barriers.

Andrew and his family thank all the friends who help him in his life journey.

Elizabeth Bloomfield, Editor
Guelph. Ontario

1 Introduction

What it's like to be me
I'm a bundle of sensations:
I get the urge
to touch and pick,
and I must follow my urges.

Can you see my urges?
I can't tell you:
I just show you.

I'm a bundle of nerves,
and a jumble of thoughts.
I'm in constant motion,
and my mind's always going.

I wonder what it's like to be you.
Do you wonder what it's like to be me?
I'm a time bomb waiting to explode,
and a tear waiting to fall.
(29 January 2003)

I have composed my autobiography about the bridges and barriers in my life so far. I learned some good things and some things not so good. I had the idea of a new book just after we published the Bridges-Over-Barriers book and DVD called *In Our Own Words*. I thought of the barriers and bridges in my life story. This book is about my life with building bridges and walking on them and having to bust past obstacles.

I decided to write this memoir because it was time for me to take stock of my life. I felt stable enough to handle the painful parts. I have done so much that is working since 1997 when I moved into my own home. We have learned so much about bridges that could be built over the many barriers. My friend B was available for more time to support me when I was ready to face looking back at some difficult times. I was lucky to be in the right place in my life to write this.

I had wanted to do this some time ago but the words did not come out until I was asked about my goals for 2011. Then it all started. I could not just state my idea because of my autism and being dependent on some support to type my thoughts. And even when I have support it helps to be asked direct questions to get me started. I don't even know if it was a totally formulated idea--more of a nugget or a kernel of an idea. I did want to write it for myself and maybe to teach others to be mindful of not putting barriers before us. We have enough barriers built into our bodies.

This is the way we approached the project. I met with B my communication friend, facilitator and confidante almost every week for the first seven months of 2011. My mother E was with us to fill in gaps so I could talk about my perspectives on the events in my life. I considered each phase of my life and typed what I recalled. B and E sometimes asked me questions to clarify and validate. The kind of question that got my memories to the surface

was "What do you remember about when you were a very little boy?" At the beginning it was hard to think of how to start each time but I got the idea and really took the lead when my mind and body let me. When I got going I had so many memories and so much to say. Thank goodness I have been pretty healthy all this time. But there were some days I had rigidity or hyperness we had to get past.

I usually composed a chapter each time. Later we edited these to combine them into stages of my life. When I compose poems, there is hardly ever any editing. The words and images pour out of my mind. But with the chapters of my autobiography, I have added and edited to include my responses to new questions by some of my readers.

My talking is really done by typing with the physical support of a perch (small wooden rod) with one end held in my closed hand and the other held and stabilized by my facilitator. Or my facilitator might support me with her hand under my wrist. I wrote this book with B as main facilitator but every week my conversations with G, E and others gave me food for thought about what I might type at our next session. J is my other experienced facilitator. I have got to know her in the past two years. J supported me while I composed most of the poetry in the second half of this book.

I need support because of my movement challenges. The words are there but not the control

to push each letter accurately. I cannot speak my thoughts and words with my voice for the same reason. The words are there but the brain won't organize itself to voice them. I work at my computer with special software and can hear the words as I type them. If I make typing mistakes because of my motor control or by losing focus for looking at the keyboard or screen, my facilitator asks me to verify what I meant. Then she fixes the typos or asks me to make myself clearer.

I would guess that nobody could tell by watching us that it is not easy for my facilitator or for me .There is a constant struggle to hold my hand firmly, to remind me to look more at the letters, and to stay with it when my body is distracted by various competing things like a hair on someone's shirt or the dog's bone in the wrong place. It is hard work for me in my mind and my muscles to do this well. It is not enough to have the words in my brain. We must work as a team to get them out of me. My words, my thoughts, but I couldn't say them alone.

I want everyone to know that I am thinking on my own. My assistant does not give me ideas that are not my own. I think people might view my education as minimal for what I have to say. But they are my words, not my supporters' or my parents', even though I know they have good thoughts too. These are my own words of my own mind just like all the words in this book. For readers who may want more detail at some points, my editor has provided footnotes.

I suppose most people would be surprised to learn that autism could be connected to movement difficulties. Making sure we understood and overcame these is an example of a bridge over a barrier in my life. Other barriers in my life were my lack of speech, my lack of social sensibilities, the little the world knew about autism, and lack of patience with people who are different.

I also had an autistic gut to learn about. I had to settle my guts down to be healthy and have a glorious life. I am allergic to many foods and all medications. I am sensitive to noise, although I make a lot of racket myself! Touch in the wrong ways can be bad as well as certain materials and seams. We learned I have problems with bumping into things and people because of not getting the feedback that could tell me where my body is. I also developed seizures at age 30 and have to be careful not to get over-tired or over-stimulated. I had to be patient as we worked on my diet and supplements because traditional drugs had really messed me up.

I want everyone to read my book but most of all people who have some similar struggles to mine. I want it to encourage them and their friends and family. I do what I need to do with what God gave me. I am trying to be the best for me. I want people to have hope and confidence in themselves. I don't want to be known as an autistic man but a man who loves art, music, running and my family. I am

the green man. Life is not always perfect but the best you make it for yourself. I am the person I am because of all my struggles but they make me strong and hopeful. I want people to take a look at themselves and consider their strengths not their weak spots. It is important to try to be your best. I am hopeful because I have family and friends who believe in me and that means I am important because I am me. I want to bring hope to others, so they too will believe in themselves.

I hope that many people will read this book or have it read to them. Some autistic people need help to hear stories like we need support to type. I want people who know about autism but not this way of talking to read my book. I want people who think autistics are not intelligent to read this book. Too many well-meaning professionals in my life thought I was clever but not that I could write or read more than single words on a card. I hope some of them will be enlightened by this and the books of others who type to talk.

I love my Bridges-Over-Barriers friends. I hope they will read this and be proud of all of us. I am an example of a person who has had support to plan my life around my needs and strengths. I hope people interested in having a say in their own lives will read my story and the people who are our advocates will read it too.

I feel I am writing a book that will make a difference for teachers now, and others who work

with children, teens and adults with autism. I want people to be open-minded and get the idea of fixing us out of their minds. We are not broken. Teach us but don't try to fix us. I want everyone to have a good life. My health is important but without my communication I would be unhappy.

I want to say a few words about different views in the autism world. I get the impression that those of us who cannot speak with our vocal chords are more restrained in criticizing others for not understanding us. I cannot talk and need to think before I communicate by typing, so lashing out is too much wasted energy. I feel like some of my verbal autistic cousins are angry at nonautistics and I cannot see why. In my observational mode as a non-speaker I can see because I cannot speak, and I know your intentions are mostly good, you and the other nonautistics.

I also want people to find ways to get to know me even without Supported Typing. I am an interesting man behind this body. People don't always get the opportunity to know this and this book will help. I am funny; I am happy; I am an artsy man with love for green and plants. I love my family and all my friends. I want everyone to be free to understand me. I think people will like me if they get to know me. Most do but they have surprised looks sometimes or just don't talk to me. I think I need to try every day to make people feel comfortable with me. I know that it takes me time also to read others.

My parents are the most important bridges in my life. They have been the wind beneath my wings. I think they should write a book about how my life has been through their eyes and how it helped them that we were a team. I may be surprised .It is probably going to be hard to hear how difficult things were for my parents. I think it should be the truth. They should not avoid the hard things; I will not be offended. I would like their book to be for the same audience as mine. So many could learn.

Acceptance

I read the news,
that in this world,
we fear.....
the homeless,
the depressed,
the different.
I am here and
I am different:
no need to fear me.
Accept everyone...
Accept those of us
who are autistic.
(13 Sep 2006)

Andrew Bloomfield
Guelph, September 2011

2 My early years to 1980

What makes me the person I am?
I think it is a combination of things:
My parents' example;
My parents' and sister's love and support;
My friends' support;
My experiences, good and bad;
Learning, communicating, working.
It is a lifelong process becoming a person.
(10 May 2006)

I remember playing with Vickie, my first bridge. I remember not being able to ask for things, but she seemed to know what I needed. I am thinking it was when I was maybe five and so was V. When I was home with V it was like a holiday.

I remember being given some drugs when I was about four. I got worse on medication. I was out of my body. It was going too fast. We stopped the drugs quite soon. Sugar and sweets also made me more hyper. I wanted what the other kids had. I have asked my parents if they withheld sweets from V because of me. I am glad she could eat sweets if she wanted to. She would have hated me.

I did not like Thistletown[1] where I started when I was almost five. I closed myself off a lot there. I did

[1] Thistletown Regional Centre, in the northwest of metropolitan Toronto, is a Children's Mental Health Centre. "House 17" was built and opened in the early

not like the lack of contact with the normal world. I thought they were mean but not horrible. They were too formal. I was a little boy and needed to know I was loved and safe.

I wonder what I could have accomplished if they spent some time on literacy. I think they were trying to reward me for saying sounds, but it was mean because they withheld the rewards when I could not say the sounds. I remember some steps I learned for getting dressed and making puzzles. I did learn those skills and chores but I would have learned eventually. I was encouraged at home in more natural ways. The rewards should have been kept for getting me to do things that were really hard and unappealing. Like putting on new socks. They gave up on lacing shoes which I did not learn on simulated shoes but finally on the real thing. Still velcro made that easier!

They spent too much time on things I could learn eventually and that were not interesting and too little time figuring out that I had a brain. This happened at T-town and in my later programs. Practice was needed for talking. Not smarties. I did work for smarties but it should have been in real

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1970s, one of very few services then available for autistic children in Ontario. Ten preschoolers were accepted for periods of up to two years. Treatment methods were based on intensive behaviour modification. From April 1973 to December 1974, Andrew's parents drove him from Guelph on Sunday evenings and brought him home Friday afternoons.

life situations, not drills. I needed people to talk to me about the world and show me math and maps and globes and let me learn from them personally. I now know this would have worked because later M, H and B talked to me about real things, and T taught me through sharing and showing, and then H and L through doing real things like art and horticulture. Working with people on my own not in a group has made a big difference. My copy typing and listening to the computer read back the information have also helped me to learn. No one explored these ideas because they did not know my brain could take it in. I know I was volatile at times when new things were introduced so they were scared for themselves and for me. So they avoided things that might stress me out.

I think that children can benefit from rewards, but at Thistletown they were cold about it. They used praise and smarties and tokens. The tokens did seem complicated to me. I get the idea now but not then. Praise worked better at home. I did not like the people at Thistletown, so did not care about their praise. I think the missing link was they didn't give me a sense that they cared about me. I loved the smarties especially green ones. I tried to grab at first. I do not think they knew I liked green. I was motivated by the smarties but I found it made me sad when I did not get them. I suppose I did try harder, but if they had been kinder it would have worked too.

I know that I went to Thistletown because everyone worried I was retarded.[2] I was aware I was different, but I didn't mind too much because I had V. Coming home was like a big smartie.

I came home to live at the end of 1974 and then was part of the first Autistic Class in Guelph.[3] I remember the teacher, but I might get her name wrong. I used to sign the first letters of her name, like I used "T" for toilet. I may not have known it was the letters then. I can recall feeling loved. I got

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[2] Andrew's parents noticed early differences from his twin sister, especially his very distressed tantrums from the age of 14 months. They thought of Autism when they read *Guardian* reviews of Dr Lorna Wing's books *Children Apart: Autistic Children and Their Families* (1968), *Teaching Autistic Children: Guidelines for Teachers* (1969) and *Autistic Children: a Guide for Parents* (1971). As Dr Wing was both child psychiatrist and mother of a daughter with severe autism, her work has helped many families. It took three years for Andrew's family to get expert advice and an official diagnosis from a neurologist and two psychologists at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. No services were available in Guelph.

[3] As soon as Andrew's autism diagnosis was known, his father started to advocate for appropriate school services in Guelph. To its credit, the Wellington County Board of Education established an Autistic Class from early 1975, just in time for Andrew to return from Thistletown, and seven years before the Ontario Government made Special Education mandatory. This class, which included Andrew for nearly six years, was located in two successive public schools in Guelph.

attention and support. I had a feeling I was in a school like V. We had Grade 6 buddies. I recall a kind girl who played with me at recess and read stories to me. Alexandra.

I started as youngest in the Autistic Class and became one of the oldest six years later. I was not really aware of all the others except some memories of new younger children who cried more and had accidents.

I still felt invisible at times, like the real AB was not known to anybody. I think they could not see me because they could not believe I could have more intelligence that was hidden. I sometimes was bored or frustrated and had meltdowns. I would scream or cry, but I have no idea how often. We did lots of puzzles and matching cards and painting things. We did those things over and over for years. What a waste of time. I needed math and writing and reading.

I taught myself with V. We had both started to read when very young, reading stories with E or G. I think V was sharing her books with me and I got it from her. V read to me and I followed along. The words just began to have meaning. I tried but reading on my own became confusing. Visually a roller coaster. Print is wild. Even now, I cannot keep fixed on a line. I can get it if I type and hear the word.

I spent nearly a month at Camp Towhee in the summers of 1975 and 1976.[4] The first time I did not really know it was just for a few weeks. I wondered if this was my new home. I did not like it there as I missed my family and my bedroom. I found it noisy but I did like the staff and kids. I liked the staff's care for me. I did not feel pressured. It was warmer than Thistletown. I did not make friends but I think we kids had compassion for each other. I did not know how to make friends but we enjoyed a sense of companionship. I know I felt bad for others when they had meltdowns. I remember a red haired boy who was more anxious than me. In those days I did not have meltdowns. More withdrawn. I was sad but not acting out yet. Only later as a teenager I got frustrated.

I hated the dining room but went into my own world to survive it. It was like eating inside the percussion section of a band. I don't recall the food. I think I did not eat much. I was not ruled by

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[4] In the summer of 1974, the Integra Foundation supported a pilot summer program for 20 young autistic children aged about six years old. Andrew was fortunate to attend in 1975 and 1976. A 25-day summer camp was offered each summer at Camp Towhee in the Haliburton Highlands. Each child had an individualized learning program combined with group experience and outdoor activities. Follow-up support was provided to each child in his home and school through the following year. This initiative was the basis of the Geneva Centre for Autism from 1977.

my stomach yet. I am glad I went to Camp Towhee even though it was hard at times.

The camp setting and times outdoors were peaceful and calming. The second summer was less scary. I remember being nervous about new experiences like canoeing and hiking but I trusted my counselors from the beginning. I liked being in a canoe and dragging my hands through the water. Swimming was fun but I shivered a lot.

Programs were designed for me. First to see if it was better to teach me speech or sign. Then to teach me to use Yes and No appropriately. I did think there was hope for me to express myself. But still when asked to sign what I wanted it was not reliable. It was not my skill but how things were asked. I remember knowing what Yes and No meant and knowing how to sign them but I automatically signed the last thing they said. I sometimes made mistakes depending on the order asked. I needed them to verify by changing the order of choices on which I was being questioned. I signed the last thing I heard. I think the only reliable way in those days was to point to the word or picture with support.

I think sign language was supposed to be a bridge and it has been for expression of basic needs.[5] But

[5] Andrew was introduced to the system called Signing Exact English (SEE) and quickly learned several hundred signs, many of which he still knows. But the original

they didn't get it that I could understand words spoken to me and I needed to learn to use my intelligence. I did not wish then that they had worked on teaching me to speak with my voice. I couldn't conceive of it. Looking back, I think we did not have enough knowledge about movement issues relating to speech. If I could go back and tell everyone I suppose I would.

When I was very young I disliked "round" vegetables or other foods like peas, beans, hard boiled eggs, sausages. So these were used in the Camp Towhee project to help me use Yes and No reliably. I remember not liking them--they were not flat. I did not think food should roll away. I didn't mind once I couldn't see its roundness. If it was mashed it would be better. I still don't like these foods at all. So Camp Towhee must have reinforced my dislike.

I think the kind staff at Camp Towhee were bridges. But the limited knowledge of my movement challenges and automatic responses were barriers at the time. The summers at Camp Towhee may have helped me grow stronger in some ways. I had a positive experience without V, E and G. I missed

---

intention that signing might become a lingua franca for non-speaking people with autism was not realized. Few children with autism learned the signs as quickly as Andrew and not enough people around him learned SEE for it to be used routinely or, as Andrew says, "situationally".

them but learned I could count on others too. It was a bridge from shy and dependent to come out a bit.

Back in the Autistic Class in Guelph, I think they built up my sign language vocabulary. Toilet or No were the first words I signed when I meant them, not when I was asked to give signs for all sorts of words. I recall everyone at school was jubilant when I signed Toilet on my own appropriately. They were excited because I used it situationally, not on request. I was pleased but not aware that I had never asked before. I knew the sign but didn't realize everyone wanted me to use it. It was a quiet ah hah moment. Not a big one. You see I was still stuck so often. I couldn't figure out what was wrong with me. But with practice some signs came when I needed them. I wondered why V could talk, but I came to just see this as our normal.

I didn't understand that back and forth communication was the point. Now I see that I needed practice asking questions and reading stories with dialogue. Supported Typing helped eventually because I was talking more and then listening to how others talked to each other more than I used to. S-T lends itself to turn taking so well; it is very structured. I may have been frustrated that I didn't get others to know what I wanted, but I thought it was up to them to figure it out.

I think as I got older I was irritated that others did not notice I was signing the same answers all the time. It was just not as functional as I wanted it to be. I liked writing; it was liberating. But I stopped learning. Why was that? The teachers may not have thought it was going to be useful. I think that they and my parents all hoped to help me be independent but abandoned things when progress was too slow to see. I got it. I thought I was dysfunctional too.

I didn't know how to make friends. My classmates and I did things together when guided to. I may have been fond of them but not close. I wanted to play with normal kids but did not understand them. V was a bridge at times. She took me along sometimes but I just watched her and her friends. I would swing and they played chasing games.

I loved to run. I ran like the wind. If the kids were playing, I thought if I ran they would come after me. I didn't understand their games. I would run when I felt bored in a place where others had things to do but I couldn't join in. I never felt lost. I knew where I was.

I had no fear when I ran. But I did start to be afraid after a dog barked in my face and it hurt my ears and startled me. Too unpredictable. I think he may have been black so that made me more wary of black dogs. It grew into an obsessive fear of all dogs even in the distance. In retrospect, I needed a dog. Black dogs don't bother me now—only barks that

are high pitched. I think my life had become driven by avoiding dogs. Our lives were ruled by it. I couldn't get out of the car sometimes. I would scream at the park. I said No to many opportunities for fear a dog might be near. It was worse when I was a teen. When I was young it was a sense of anxiety. With E and G, it was not impossible for me go places, as it became impossible at Kerry's Place later. I did run sometimes though, when the urge was strong. It was wonderful that V later made my parents get me that first dog.

How I learned to read is an interesting question. I think they gave up teaching me to read and did not know I could. Before I started school my parents read to us and V pointed to the words for me so I read whole short words. At school some of it sunk in but I could not read out loud to show them. So I kept learning from circle time and puzzles and Sesame Street type books. I remember loving the dictionary because it was full of words and pictures too. It seemed very grown up to look at it. It was a clue to others that I was smart. I fell in love with reading and words. I liked *Fortune* magazine because that was what G read. It was very grown up--the words were big and interesting. I could not read lines but words jumped off the page and I knew some of what it was about. Not really but it challenged me. Most magazines had a calming effect on me.

Math in my head makes sense, but in the real world it is not something I can apply. Visual info

helps. Math formulas are possible but concrete transferring of it is so confusing. Most unfortunate I could not show my interest in learning. With number concepts I would like to be able to understand the word connected to the value. I wonder if an assistant or tutor could have supported me in a regular classroom. Maybe if they were like H or L. And home schooling would have been too lonely. I needed to be with other children.

I did not use the pronouns "I" or "me" but referred to myself as “AB” in signs. I think I saw “AB” on some report. I am very aware of me as a distinct individual. It seems unnecessary to type “I”.

I loved puzzles. I could lose myself in them and shut out the world. They made sense to me. They were done when the last piece was in place. If a puzzle was out, I had to do it and finish it and put it away. I felt proud I could do this on my own. I did not see the colours or pictures--only the shapes which is why I could do a puzzle upside down.

Our early games were building things and matching games like dominos, Pick up Sticks, and some building block games. I didn’t really connect with other people while playing; it was just about the task. But it helped me do things with others. I think my family loved games and still does. Games continue to be a bridge for me to connect with friends.

I liked having a quiet safe life with my small family. I now see that I might have been too sheltered but it was a good childhood. I felt people pitied us and were annoyed if I was noisy. I didn't mind too much when I was little but did as I got older. I was hyper at night and didn't sleep much. I screeched at times in excitement. I was active and could not stop. I was driven to keep moving. The laugh was a nervous expression of mounting anxiety that mostly came from inside. But the disapproval of others got under my skin as I grew and I was worried about doing the very thing I ended up doing.

I remember the Rainbow summer day camps in Guelph[6] as a free and fun time. They kept all of us together. It made me feel part of the group. I could be with V, as I was not with her at school. So this was special for me. I liked the bus ride although it was noisy, because we sat together. I don't recall much of where we went on trips or what we did but the time was low stress and kind of fun. Different counselors took turns. No therapy. I felt more normal. I do remember macraméing some pot holder. I liked both pottery and macramé:

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[6] For the local chapter of what is now Autism Ontario formed in 1974, an important function was summer camp programs. After two years co-operating with Waterloo, Andrew's family organized Guelph's first summer day camp for children with autism and learning disabilities in 1977, and from 1978 co-operated with Rainbow Programmes for Children which has continued to offer summer day programs for children and youth.

different experiences, one free, one with more structure to follow. I think they sewed it together. I just did a long strip. I might like to try macramé again--it could use my hands when nervous energy is boiling over.

I heard music at camp every day. We had songs and drumming. I sort of banged on a drum and V had cymbals that hurt my ears but I tried not to scream because she was having fun. I did beat the drum because I could manage it but I didn't really enjoy it. I liked listening to music more than trying to make it. I couldn't imagine being able to do more but in retrospect it might have been helpful. Music at school helped with routines like the tidy up song. It went "tidy up, tidy up, everybody tidy up". I remember the song and liked knowing what to do.

I think every teacher of autistic kids should include swimming, music and a farm. I think I started to learn swimming at Camp Towhee, but I loved swimming with my Guelph teacher. I felt free and joyous like a dolphin and maybe squeaked like one too. I was the best swimmer in the class so I had some freedom. I do not recall pool noise as a problem there. It was so liberating. I remember visiting Mr B's farm most weeks. He was principal of the school when our class was there. I think he had chickens and goats. I liked the freedom. I poured water into buckets and I ran freely in the field. I was fascinated with water. I used to like to put my hands under running water and watch it. I

loved flushing the toilet and watching the water swirl, disappear and return. I thought it got cleaned and came back clear.

When I was a young child I would wear more varied clothes, like-turtlenecks and corduroys. But maybe at 12, different textures and weights began to annoy me. Each time it would be worse and I grew reluctant to try any new clothes. In my teens I felt I had to be emphatic as it seemed unbearable to imagine wearing new things that might hurt or be noisy.

V might have been a bit envious of the fun things our class did. My teacher came to dinner often with us. There were surveys and research projects and special visitors to our home. I felt V was often mad that I had special treatment but she loved me too. I think she was annoyed by having to answer questions and be watched sometimes. V was passionate about books and some other interests. I felt in awe of her intelligence. I loved her room--it was very Vickie. I wished I could read as well as her but she read to me sometimes. I got into trouble if I touched her things without permission. I was not allowed to rearrange her things. I learned not to. In other parts of the house I could because my mother was tolerant.

I think one bridge in my early years was V. I made sense of things through watching her try first. If I was afraid to try something new she did it first and I could see how to do it or that it was safe. Such as

when I was not sure how to make it go--I mean some toys or games. I might have been inside the box it came in but I was watching V. Having V as my twin was a big bridge. But maybe I held her back. She had to wait for me in many ways. I think I was a constant source of hardship. I remember she loved ballerinas but didn't pursue ballet for long. I wonder if she resented me. But she made the best of things in our life together. I think she made it her business to be my buffer and guide. I wonder if she learned from me. I think she chased me around when we were toddlers. Later she crossed the lines first, so I could follow. I'm sorry if she felt I got too much attention.

My anxieties grew as I grew and people drew away from me because they were afraid to set me off. I felt the anxiety growing over the years before KP but maybe I pulled away from people more than they avoided me. I wish I had had more experiences with typical children. My world got smaller when I needed more experiences to build bridges. Maybe being in a regular classroom would have been a mistake but I wish they had done it when I was small. I might have found it confusing or too chaotic but it's hard to know. I don't think anyone appreciated how much I wanted to and could learn. Why did they decide against it for me? I see it was because I couldn't talk. So that was a big obstacle.

3 My Adolescence, 1980-1989

...I had to hope others
would see in my eyes and behaviour,
but these were not reliable.
I saw that nobody really knew
how smart I was,
but I had no way to express myself.
It felt like I was observing my own life
but not controlling it.
I was sad and at times frustrated
if I needed to say something...
(December 2003)

Not sure why I had to go to Kerry's Place but I think I outgrew the Guelph class and there were no good alternatives.[7] I was sad to go away again. I was shocked when E and G left me there--it was a scary night. I wish I could have asked more questions. I didn't get it that they weren't leaving me forever.

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[7] Kerry's Place (KP) was then a residential school for eleven teenagers located at Clarksburg in the Beaver Valley of Grey County. Andrew calls it KP North. Founded in 1974 by a group of Toronto parents, it was funded as a Children's Mental Health Centre and named for the daughter of the family on whose farm the school was established. The large corporate entity that grew out of that pilot project is now Kerry's Place Autism Services. A place for Andrew became available in late November 1980 after a new adult centre was opened near Orangeville. The Kerry's Place Adolescent Program was moved to Maple, York Region in mid-1984. Andrew was a student at KP until the end of October 1989.

Practice visits and a social story would have helped. I liked some of it but sometimes I felt jailed. I liked the barn and the food, and the classroom because they knew I was smart. I think F thought I was an impatient brat but H was very kind.

KP staff used a bit of sign and we could use pic symbols in later years. Not much but some. I liked it that pics had words too. The classroom was calm. They had rules and structure. Order hardly varied. I read cards that had stories. They were easy to read in small chunks. They were in a file box and the stories I remember were about animals. The teachers read and I listened and looked at the picture on the card. Some words I could read but they didn't know, I think. I drew lines to match things.

I remember D and R were kind. D was big so I listened to him. R was kind and generous. He gave of himself and his time. The KP building had been started by the O family on their apple orchard and was named for their autistic daughter. Kerry was much older than me. She had lots of freedom. She did not live in our wing of the house and got to run around more. There was not enough known about autism and good strategies when she was young. S-T and diet ideas came along in time for me to really benefit. So I was luckier than Kerry.

I liked being with staff more than my peers. I got information and learned from listening. I heard about their lives and their children and politics. I

heard their opinions about candidates. Some read to me. They just read out loud and I listened. Sometimes stories about animals or adventures. I remember H the teacher, the music therapist and speech therapist. I liked music and knew S was trying although some of it was too juvenile. The speech person was boring. I thought he was clueless. I think he did repetitive things and talked more to the staff than to me. I wonder if the staff learned from him.

I don't remember anything much about my room at KP North. I slept there mostly. I guess I had some magazines there. No strong memories. I liked it there better than KP Maple. I got more agitated in the dining-room at Maple than anywhere. It was loud. At KP North I did like the long halls to run in, my own room and the apple orchard.

At KP North I did chores in the barn, the mud room, and office too. Sweeping, copying, stapling and making beds. I liked office work and barn chores. Making my bed was hard to learn. Staff wanted to please me because I could be so agitated. I was withdrawn at first. They could see I liked to run though. The trail was fun. I felt free out there. The barn was quiet, dark, cool and calming. I fed the pigs. The work was repetitive and stress-free.

Behaviour modification was used somewhat. I remember tokens in the classroom. It was a bit demeaning to me but I think it helped some of the others. I thought it wasn't worth working for the

rewards. I would work if I could or if I wanted to. Breaks motivated me somewhat. Praise helped me to try harder for that person.

I remember some of the other students. A G and an L--he was funny, he drove staff crazy. He teased and went slow. I would like to have had more social outlets and maybe a girlfriend. I wish there had been girls at KP North. I might have become friends with them.

I don't remember so much about the people in the Clarksburg community. The drive back and forth was pleasant, mostly with E directly between Clarksburg and Guelph. But sometimes I went in the KP van with all the other students and G met me in Toronto. I liked the farm setting but Clarksburg was far from home and had too many people.

I did not know why KP moved to Maple. I didn't even wonder much about the move. It was just a fact. I know now that the Toronto students would be closer to their homes. But that did not work for me. It was just as far to get home from Maple and the drive became more stressful. I did think it was sad to leave Clarksburg.

I remember helping to pack and clean. It did help in the end to make us ready for the move but while we were doing the packing and cleaning it didn't seem real. I think once the staff took us for a day trip too. We moved some of our bedroom things

and saw our new rooms. They took us to prepare us for change but it was still not real until we had slept there. I liked the place--it felt like a palace, with high ceilings, pretty rooms, nice doors and stairs. I liked exploring the house at first. Fun to see our things moving in. I liked the staff and felt safe with them. I remember that B's office was upstairs in the attic. It was quiet there.

I did not like the Maple place for long. The bedroom was annoying. It had too many of us in one room. We had a partition but it was not really private. There was more distraction than at Clarksburg. It was not as dark at night and I felt interrupted when people went in and out.

I got it that the Maple dining room was meant to be improved from Clarksburg. It looked nice. But really too many were eating in the room at the same time, when I think about it now. There was no room to move around. I felt stressed at meal times waiting to eat and some of the other people were very noisy. It got worse as I got older.

I think it was also my hormonal changes to being a man. I became more angry over time as my adolescent rage kicked in. I think this was because of sexual arousal and frustration and my wanting to be liked and admired and known to be smart. I got to know S a bit at Maple. She was pretty and kindhearted. She tried hard to please people and I could tell she was smart.

I was hitting the worst part of adolescence and needed to run. I started clapping my hands and shrieking and R or J would point me out the door to the back driveway. What else could they do? At first I thought they were kicking me out but I came to feel relief. I had a picture wallet. There was sometimes a conversation before meals about using escape pics. It worked if someone sat next to me and noticed a warning sign and handed me the book. I had a page of "I wants" like "get out of here", "a break" or "stop" or "snack" or "washroom".

It was usually just an explosion as I reached the end of my coping. I was like an avalanche starter. A loud explosion can set off an avalanche. My noise could make another student turn and hit or bite someone else. I know other students were also bothered by the crowded and noisy room too but I couldn't really communicate with them or maybe we could have tried to demonstrate!

I had admired the teachers in Clarksburg. They knew I was needing intellectual stimulation. I missed them. The Maple classroom was a place where I acted from my gut. I did not get much there. It seemed that everyone looked at our behaviour more than our minds and communication. I think my mind was less engaged and so I acted out more.

I remember some music at KP. The songs were juvenile but after a while S did more jazzy and African beats. I think it was one of many things that felt silly but could be endured.

Working in the Maple high school library was heaven. Quiet and orderly. I shelved and put labels on books and did copying in the office. I felt adult and useful and calm.

I learned some good things at KP Maple. I learned to ride the bike in the driveway and there was a barn too. It was not so difficult to learn because D was a good teacher. She let me feel it by pushing from behind me and telling me to keep pedaling. I learned almost right away but I think she put a riding helmet on me. I also got a bike at home at this time and loved to wheel around the crescent.

KP staff also helped me to get more comfortable with dogs. I think they knew that my fear of dogs was a serious obstacle. We spent time visiting dogs, brushing, feeding and walking them. It was good to work on the same things at home and at KP. Less anxiety felt like freedom. It was gradual, like pulling a curtain slowly.

Through the KP years I spent about half my time at home. V had been very sad when I went away to KP North when we were 12. When we were 16-17, I remember her becoming more involved when I came home for weekends and holidays. I was so glad she wanted to be more connected to me and

help me. Every Saturday night we went by car to the University and we photocopied things for G and E and for the Autism Society. I still like doing copying with G.

A big incident with a dog in March 1985 at Guelph Lake made V determined to get me over my fear of dogs. The dog was big, black and loud. V, G and I were getting out of the car at the conservation area. He came from nowhere and I was unprepared and fled. I ran across the frozen lake. I just had to run for my life. Voices of the people calling me did not penetrate until I was tired and slowing down. I did start to realize I was lost but it must have been a good long time after I had run. I ran in circles trying to find a sight of V. I thought she would come after me. I know now that my running was too fast and the ice was thin. I remember hearing my name and a pole was extended to me. I did grab the pole after a while. I was not aware then I was on thin ice. I waited for G and V in a police car under a blanket.

After that V had the idea to get to know Angus. He lived with Mrs Flint, our neighbour. We borrowed Angus to go for walks and runs. V helped me with Angus and was firm but loving with me. She insisted that I work on getting used to caring for a dog but she praised me a lot when I went out with her without a meltdown. I was very anxious at first but I wanted to please V. I liked looking after Angus when Mrs Flint was away. She was a dear friend who left her Golden dog Angus to me when she

died. I got used to Angus but it took a lot longer to get comfortable with other dogs. Black shiny dogs scared me. I thought all black dogs had a loud ferocious bark. I got over it but they still make me a bit nervous.

G took us on road trips around the area. We started playing more games—like Sevens that my New Zealand grandparents taught us. It was a numbers game. V had a strategy of her own. Her goal was to stay in the game rather than finish first. I loved her: she was one of a kind.

I was segregated in my teenage years and at KP. I wish in those years I had made some friends. I mean peers like my Bridges friends now. I lived with peers but we were not really able to connect. I wish I had been able to connect more with M. He came later and was smart. I needed friends who were smart. M's eyes told me he was. He didn't speak with his voice. In some drifts I got his thoughts. I could read his thoughts clearly when he was near me. He said "they treat us like animals in the zoo". We were in the dining room together and I think the class room too. He was angry and frustrated; I was sad and frustrated. He broke things; I self-abused.

My teenage years could have been better if I had been able to go to KP only in the day time, not overnight. I wish the transition had gone better when I left there.

4 My Twenties: the worst of times and the best of times

I had to struggle with my body every day
I might be either frozen and stuck or
hyperactive and sleepless.
The worst things are:
feeling my body is not part of me,
seeing myself from outside,
my thoughts not from my head...
(31 January 2005).

I am bracing myself to recall this dark time in my past. It will be difficult to talk about the years after Kerry's Place. I need to keep counting my blessings as a strategy if I get anxious.

When I turned 21, there was pressure from KP for me to move on. A new group home for adults with autism was being started in the Petrolia area and I was invited to go there. It all happened rather quickly. It was far away. I wasn't sure what was happening. It wasn't real. Why didn't I get to meet the staff? They should have met my workers at KP to learn all about me.

I remember going with V and G at the end of October. We moved me into the new house which was smaller than KP. I had my own room; there was nothing interesting about it that I recall. But my stereo was nice. At KP I could not have that. I walked mostly--not much to do. Staff were kind but

not aware of my abilities. I don't think I worked anywhere. I didn't have enough breaks from monotony. My recollection is that I was bored a lot. I do recall liking that it was quieter than KP. K was a good cook and welcomed me. I didn't get the sense that the staff understood how intelligent I was. They did care but had things wrong.

I really tried to be good for the first six months. My honeymoon led to a nightmare. I broke down, ran out of coping mechanisms, and later got sent to a completely bad place.

For communication, I recall picture symbols but they didn't help me express myself--just basic things. I think the staff knew my basic signs like Toilet, No, Yes, Please, Finished. At KP more active and interesting things were going on. I really declined and there is no way to avoid it.

I came home for four days every other weekend. It was a long drive. I didn't mind going home to Guelph but the drive back to Petrolia always seemed much longer. I remember V was what I looked forward to all week. She was my bridge to the world, while at the group home I was isolated. In August 1990 G and E went to Quebec and New England for a break. V and I loved the freedom of those two weeks. We felt free and giddy with it as I recall. Not that G and E were jailors though.

Back at the group home in fall 1990, I seemed to be withdrawn, even frozen. So when Temple Grandin

was quoted about an antidepressant drug that helped her, staff thought it should be tried on me—and KP people agreed[8]. It wasn't explained to me then what to expect but I know I got agitated and hyper. Temple said that it should be used in very small doses. But with me the drug was increased when at first it didn't work. It had the opposite effect from what was intended. I was lost. It was a whirlwind. My mind was on fast forward. I was out of control. My body was not listening to my mind. Worse than ever in my life. My nervous system was moving too fast to even think. I had rage outbursts and meltdowns and my appetite was out of control.

I heard V say to bring me home. I was afraid to come home though, because I was out of control. I did not plan to break the window at the group home. I was in a rage and hit the window by accident. The police came and chased me around until one sat on me. Well he sat on my legs and held my arms. I was screaming and crying but scared, so I stopped. G and V came to take me

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[8] The recommended drug was Imipramine. Temple Grandin visited Ontario to give presentations about her life with autism and made a big impression. She always stressed that people with autism needed only very small dosages of any medication, because of their complex sensitivities, and that some people might not be helped by it, but her advice was not always heeded. Andrew admires Temple Grandin and her work. He shares her insights into dogs and horses and her need for sensory pressure.

home and I ran to the car and did not look back. I hoped to not return. I have not been able to talk about this time at all until now.

They brought me home just before our 23rd birthday. I remained very mixed up for the rest of that year and some hard years were still to follow. But two wonderful things happened soon after. Three weeks later Zachary came to be my new dog. Then a month later M and H came to introduce me to FC (Facilitated Communicating) which we now call S-T (for Supported Typing).[9]

Zack was my new bridge. I loved him; he loved me. I remember the day Zack came. It was tense. I was excited and happy but out of control as usual. It went well because W was kind and really wanted to give Zack to me. I liked him and hoped he would adjust to me. And he did and was my loyal and loving companion for the next nine years.

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[9] Facilitated Communication, which we now call Supported Typing, was first developed in the 1980s in Victoria, Australia, to help people with Cerebral Palsy. From about 1990, it has also been used by people on the autism spectrum who cannot speak with their voices. It is based on understanding that movement disabilities can affect a person's whole body including vocal chords, and on a presumption of competence—that contrary to assumptions, people with autism can express thoughts and feelings when given appropriate emotional and physical support. Some of this is explained in a book edited by Andrew in 2010: *Bridges-Over-Barriers: In Our Own Words*.

I remember the first time I used S-T, when I typed to talk for the first time in words that made sense. The day that M and H came to show me S-T, I was jumping and shrieking but somehow did hear M offering it to me. I typed Zack's name, where I was born, and where my grandparents lived. I knew I could spell and was thrilled M had a way to stabilize me. It was another new bridge. Too bad my body was ruined by the drugs. The drugs affected me for months after I stopped taking any and I could not control my body's reactions. I worried I would never be better. I was in turmoil. My inside was conflicted. The intelligent brain and the out of control body.

I want to make sure we talk about the beginnings of S-T--the sessions in the garage and how they taught me to communicate. The people were H and V mostly. I think doing it over and over gave me confidence and opened up my mind each time. I was astounded that I could finally express the sophistication of my thoughts. It is exciting to recall that part. I was upset that I was so out of control but relieved they did not blame me. I think S-T was the best bridge, and the people who helped me learn to traverse it have been M to H to V to E to B and J, accompanying me and creating new bridges. Even the synapses of my brain were new bridges.

Through H and S I was able to get communication devices such as the Canon and the Epson. I was thrilled with each device as it gave me my voice. I

liked feeling important like a real working person with typewriters and new technology. I met people from other countries and showed them how I communicated. Several communication professionals visited from Zimbabwe. I liked them; they were open and gentle and encouraging. I was not nervous as they believed in my abilities. No problem.

H asked me to show my communication to Special Education teachers in a summer course in Hamilton. I remember being very excited with some agitation but V anchored me. I think her presence calmed me as she touched my arm sometimes and spoke calmly to me. I typed a statement I had composed in advance and I also answered questions from the group. I had no trouble answering but after a while did get overwhelmed and asked for a break. I knew H and V were so proud and relieved. Bridges in this experience were the chance to be a teacher for the first time and having them believe I could do it. My out-of-control body might have been a barrier, but my family and H gave me a chance and did not let it be. I think I would like to talk more about that time.

I was locked before S-T. When others did not understand me, I was sad and frustrated and agitated all the time. I got angry. I was hopeless. I never expected to find a better way. I knew I could spell and read. But I had no way to show it. A few intuitive people really looked inside and past my autism. I was surprised by S-T. It was so liberating.

Meanwhile there had been a change in my life. For a few hours each week for a few months in 1991, K was my part-time tutor. Then she got a full job and there were no services or funds to help me stay at home in Guelph. I was still agitated and out of control most of the time and needed at least one person with me. The only help anyone could suggest was that I go to MRC for weekdays and come home weekends.[10] I hated it from the beginning. It smelled bad, it was noisy and cold, and people treated me like a criminal. It was also true they treated me like a child but the criminal part I felt because there were locked wards and alarms and no freedom. I couldn't talk to E and G and V about how I felt--it upset us all so much. I

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[10] Midwestern Regional Centre (MRC) was one of 16 institutions (also called facilities) in Ontario for persons with a developmental disability who could not be served in their home communities. From 1974 the institutions were directly administered by the Ministry of Community and Social Services. Located outside Palmerston, about an hour's drive north of Guelph, MRC was the most recently opened (in 1965) and the smallest of Ontario's institutions. By the time Andrew went there, MRC housed about 80, only one third of its capacity. Few of the services that might have been offered in the institution's heyday were available as it contracted towards its closing in 1998. Andrew was a "temporary resident" there from February 1992 to November 1996.

didn't completely understand why people had to go there. I knew my family loved me but wondered why I was being punished. I avoided talking about it because I lost control and had meltdowns when I tried to type about how I felt there.

I remember that J of the MRC staff could support my S-T, but I typed very little there. The device was never around. Professionals H and S came to MRC to show the staff how I communicated, and my family too. I was glad to see someone who knew I was smart. I know they tried to show me off but it never made a difference.

I hated the living conditions there, like sharing a bedroom and even a large ward with many beds for a while. It was hard to sleep. So they gave more drugs but they made me worse. Drugs to get me to sleep had the opposite effect. I told G and E that they kept giving me drugs and my behaviour was worse. I said that medication is bad because it scrambles my brain. It took a while, but we asked specialists to look at my records. They determined that my body reacted badly to drugs and also had many allergies. Thank goodness for them. We needed credible medical people to get them to take me off the drugs.

During the hard years of being at MRC during the week, I still had my wonderful weekends at home or on trips. I remember going places with V as two adventurers, usually with Zack as well. Most weekends we went to Spirit Valley or H came to us

for communication. We also went to riding stables to work for the horses and have rides. We hiked in woods and took car trips to many places in southern Ontario and nearby parts of the US. We went several times to Niagara Falls and to the Ford Museum and Greenfield Village in Michigan.

V and I visited Camphill Village Ontario and Bittersweet Farms community in Ohio which I really liked as it is autism-friendly. I enjoyed going everywhere with V. She supported my communication and she was friendly to others. She calmed me and was firm too. I enjoyed her company and she freed me from the constraints of MRC. She showed me that I could have and benefit from a dog and that I could travel and stay in hotels. Everywhere we went we tried to include some bowling. I liked it that bowling involved straight lines and there were borders. It was easy to see how I did. We went at quiet times, but I didn't mind the noise there--it was predictable noise. We also went on any train trips we could, usually with G as well. How nice these memories are. I was lucky to have that time with V. I wish it didn't have to end.[11]

Waterloo-Wellington Autism Services tried to help me have some work experiences in my community.

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[11] V's account of these adventures is included in Chapter 8, "Exploring the world with friends," in *About myself: portrait of Andrew who has autism*, by Lucie Milne and the Bloomfield family, Guelph 1998, reprinted 2003.

It was practice trying out work in new places like offices, motels, stores, pubs. I learned to clean washrooms, vacuum, deliver catalogs and clean airline headsets. I liked work that involved organizing things. At the Co-op in Listowel I organized the recycling. Cleaning was ok but boring after a while as a job. Vacuuming never had a clear end. In a library for a while, I put books on the shelves by numbers. The idea was that the project would set me up so that MRC staff and co-workers could carry on giving me some support. But that didn't work out though V and E also tried to keep jobs going. People didn't really have the ability to carry on what had been started. I think we learned why person-directed lives are so important.

I know V's accident was in February 1996. She died on the way home from driving me back to MRC on Sunday evening. E came to get me. They told me first at MRC. I remember B was kind. J gave me lots of time to talk with S-T. I was not surprised as there was a blizzard and the road was very icy. I had had a bad dream about V driving home. But I believed she was still alive and hurt. I didn't know that I would never see her again. The days after were surreal. I think I went into a trance. I was relieved to see G and E. It was hard coming home to no V. An empty place in the house for us all for a long time. It is amazing I can talk about it now. The pain is smaller, under control, but always there.

H and K came often to support me to type about how I felt in the weeks and months after the

accident. I remember I was so distraught I could not control myself some days. I screamed and raced around. At V's memorial service at the Arboretum Centre it was hard to stay calm. I slapped my hands a bit. I really appreciated D that day. He didn't try to keep me away but he got me out when needed.

On Victoria Day we met with kind friends at Spirit Valley Farm to share ideas about how to go on. That was a special day. People knew I lost my most important bridge and E and G lost their little girl and hope for our future. I think of V all the time. She is with me when I need her. I think she is here in spirit. Thank you for helping me to talk about it. It was not as bad as I thought it would be.

5 Becoming a Whole Person

I want to talk about planning my future and starting to transform my life. My mind was in a blur in 1996-7. So sad about V and so sick from the drugs. I never knew what day it was but I knew I wanted my own home and never to be trapped in an institution again. Thank goodness for Supported Typing, my friends and family. Some friends spent time with me directly. Some worked with G and E in advocating for better supports and services to fit my needs.

M was a gem, another bridge to the world at that time. She was a facilitator of many experiences for me. I liked her support of me when horse riding at Sunrise Equestrian. She was a pleasant influence on me. I needed someone to fill some of V's shoes. I found some comfort being with M since she knew V. I needed young women as tutor-companions at that time. I enjoyed making my film with M, *A Portrait of Andrew as a Young Man* (1997). I began to think I could help to teach others. It was helpful in giving new support people and friends a sense of my interests and abilities.

I often visited Spirit Valley Farm and loved to work in the woods trimming trees with G supporting me and often my friend AF too. I liked being active and useful and admired for my skills. I never knew I could really be a workman. Spirit Valley was a bridge to my love and concern for the environment. Being there awakened my

"greenness" and love of gardening. It was the beginning of my awareness that our earth is something to be taken care of. I think I was healing and emerging at the same time.

I recall we met many people then who knew about planning good lives and we listened to them and some of them listened to me. I do not know all the names but John Lord must have come into my life around then. It was a time of trying to get some new funding for me too. I didn't understand all of the details but knew it was about me.

When I began to direct my own life in October 1996, my goal was to try my best to be a good man. I knew I needed several things. Four years later I was on my way with most of these. I recalled and elaborated them when I told my friends that a good day and a good life should include all the things in my 1996 plan:

- my own home shared with people I choose
- a coordinator like E
- deliberate structure, planned days, some predictability
- reliable ways to communicate my wants and needs and to interact with others
- friends of various ages, circumstances and interests, who understand, believe in and help me
- an interesting and balanced life of learning and real work
- exercise outdoors and relaxation indoors
- caring for my home, garden and dogs

- keeping informed and being a good citizen
- health care including my special diet and sensory integration strategies.

Yes, we got them all in that 1996 list. But in November 2000 I added some more needs: my soul--music, prayer and meditation—and also some kind of safety net for the future.

5.1 A Home of My Own

I was excited about the idea of a home of my own. But while I wanted it I could barely imagine it. I had ideas--it was a heady powerful feeling to think I could control my life. I didn't want to visit the house before we actually bought it. I was scared something would go wrong and I would be disappointed. I just believed E and G would make a good choice. They definitely considered my thoughts and feelings and made an excellent choice of house, garden and neighbourhood.

I didn't move in for more than a month after we took possession of the house. I visited every day with DJ, working on getting used to a new environment. I recall that he was friendly and we had nice visits here, in the garden and playing games inside. I felt I was getting to know my new house. It felt like a club house at first.

I invited my friends to a housewarming in early July. There was almost no furniture in the house, so people brought their lawn chairs. It was special that young M took her first steps in my living room on her first birthday. It was a milestone day for me

too. A new friend led us all to talk about being a circle of friends. I liked the party. It was a wonderful celebration of my new life. We talked about ideas and had good food and some swimming.

An early emergency with the Waverly water system led to lots of improvements in the house and outside. The kitchen tap broke and water was spurting as there was no shutoff valve there. I remember laughing while everyone ran around. All the work felt like a home invasion for several months. It was quiet and then an explosion of noises and people and machines. I came to observe but it was very stressful. We did not have our appliances in till the end of October so our time was split, with most meals at our Caribou house.

I recall sleeping here for the first time on August 1. It was a calmer night than we expected. I bonded very quickly in my new house. I loved it because it was being constructed around my needs. I liked how quiet it was, not having to share with strangers, and everyone asking for my input. It was not upsetting to go back to Caribou but I wanted everything to happen at Waverly from then on.

I enjoyed feeling like a home owner, master of my house, so looking after it was rewarding. I liked vacuuming and cleaning the floors with a mop but not doing the toilets. I liked cleaning but L does a better job now so my efforts go to the dogs and garden and cooking.

Guelph Services for the Autistic became my housing trust. GSA and my parents and I signed the important legal agreements on 11 February 1998. GSA promised that I can live in my home for as long as I want and need, and as long as I and my family can provide the money. The GSA directors have given me a sense of security as well as respect and friendship ever since. [12]

We also managed to get some funds flowing to support me from October 1998. So I could afford to have some people working for me. I remember those who helped me in the first three years that I lived in my home.

I met T in August 1997. She was an English graduate from the U of Guelph and became my tutor for nearly two years. We did lots of work in the house and garden together. We went to the library and on various field trips such as Crawford Lake and T's brothers' farms. We painted and planted flowers and read books. I know she patiently taught me how to copy type, letter by letter. At first it was confusing but with practice I got better at it and the letters stayed put. I did

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[12] GSA has been a housing trust since 1997, dedicated to helping adults with autism to have their own homes. GSA has published a guide to its model of home ownership. *Creating a Home and Good Life of My Own: Strategies and formal agreements developed by Guelph Services for the Autistic in its role as housing trust.* Edited by Elizabeth & Gerald Bloomfield, 2008.

copy-typing jobs for friends. I love doing useful things for people I know. I typed a Logic paper for D; I got some little glimmers of understanding of the difficult concepts but not much. T introduced me to poetry. I loved hearing it and typing it. I could follow the images because they were shorter than prose sentences.

T was a bridge because she taught me in ways that I had missed for years. She helped me build on my intelligence and I needed that stimulation and confidence. T has remained an important friend in my life. She and her family are now neighbours and she is a director of my FAB Aroha. Her husband T is my running partner and on the board of GSA which holds my house in trust. I feel I am a kind of uncle to their children.

Other supporters in those years included J with whom I swam in the U of G pools. He also helped us with building the terrace at the back of my house. I liked J: he was gentle and encouraging. He invited me to jazz and folk festivals like Hillside. I liked C who supported my routines a couple of mornings a week and also drove me to Mr E's workshop for a year or so. It was nice being with a man. It felt less childish, not like having a nanny. I was disappointed when C moved away from Guelph. He was a fine man supporter in many ways; he took his work seriously but was relaxed and energetic enough to keep me going. He talked to me about things too. He was respectful and did not treat me like a child.

When getting to know new friends or supporters, it was often good to share a walk with me and my dogs and then have tea and a board or card game together. Some friends offered regular times for shared interests. M came one evening each week for a couple of years and we enjoyed doing puzzles together. Puzzles settled me then but I have more to do now so they are less important. D used to come over from Waterloo so I could bike while he ran. We also played board games and he tried to teach me chess. D is important to my future as he is president of my FAB Aroha.

After T went away to train as a teacher, new support people came into my life. Having half-days with people was different from all day with T. Less routine but rest times possible. For nearly a year till she went away to art school, S made me open to the idea of expressing myself with art. She was lively and encouraged me to go for it. She brought materials to use in new ways. I didn't have to make things in the image of reality. I liked her but at times her energy made me tired!

I was pleased to meet H from 1999. She is still a healing presence in my life and has developed my interest in painting as well as in speaking a bit. She first got to know our whole family and then on her own with me. It is the best way to get started with me for all concerned. H keeps her mind open. She and I are well suited to each other. We are both freedom finders, seeking freedom from the

stresses of life and being hopeful in new experiences.

My dog Zach helped me to adjust to my new life. It was natural having him around so he made Waverly feel like home. Zach accompanied me while we explored and learned our way around. He helped me make friends too. So did the new young dog Amy who joined our household in late 1999, about six months before Zach came to the end of his life. Amy was specially trained as a service dog and was my loyal companion from November 1999 to September 2011 when she reached the end of her long life. For more than two years Amy was showing my new young service dog Yukon how to support me and how our household runs.

The first few years in my own home helped me get used to having a life centred on my needs and strengths. A big part of the plan of having my own home was that I choose the people who share my home and who support me. These were all new ideas. I trusted E and G to be sensitive in choosing and training people to support me. But we are all glad that I have been able to communicate my own thoughts regularly since 2000. I have continued to grow in understanding my choices and responsibilities. I am so glad to be in my own home. I have felt proud and grown up and not impeded by others.

From 2000 I typed a lot about living in my own home. In January 2001 I said: "I want to live in my

house forever. I want to mind my own life as much as possible. I need to lessen dependence on my parents. I need people to count on." I felt very comfortable and happy in my home by July 2003, when I typed this message for E to take to a conference of people interested in my good life:

> People should know what a wonderful home I have and the things I do every day. I have my own home and it revolves around me. I know everyone who comes here is friendly to me. I'm sorry more people can't have this. I have this because my parents are good advocates and they got me individual funds to help.
>
> I am comfortable and safe in my home. It is a friendly neighbourhood. I have got out a lot and they see me and I deliver the Tribune newspaper. I like to greet people when they greet me. I try to smile. My dog Amy is my friendmaker. I love to walk with her. I have space for different things--like art, the computer and exercise, and my room is private. There is an apartment downstairs and three rooms upstairs and many bathrooms. My garden is heaven on earth. My bathroom sensor is a good idea and my alarm on the bedroom door. If I need help I can open the door. It was a real adult accomplishment to use my key to open the front door.

> I'm happy with our progress. Well planned and not stressful. I grow into each step. I like to be a pioneer but it is too slow and scary sometimes. I might get the wrong people. I have lots of good people in my life. I think the conference people may want to know that I am interested in interviewing people to support me. Yes, it is most important that I get a say.

For a presentation in May 2005, I added more thoughts about directing my own life.

> I think IF [Individualized Funding) has made all the difference for me. I might tell people that it is essential to get IF, because it is the only way to give people choices and options. We must have the freedom to have our own life, choose our own path and choose our own supports. I think we need to know we can provide for our own supporters, so we can choose good ones.

One of the key ideas about having my home is that I choose the people I share it with. We had circle meetings to talk about these ideas. I formulated my thoughts about homesharing and we tried out some plans.

> I want to feel that the people in my house are here for me, not because the rent is cheap. I think it will be clear by the way they react to me and by the greetings and interactions. I think I will know after two real meetings and maybe a trial overnight or weekend.

Homesharers should be interested in the environment so the house will be run by people who care like me. I want loving people. I want to be able to teach but not be a guinea pig. I like to think I can inspire others (24 August 2000).

Homesharers should be different from each other, but have some beliefs and interests in common. It is important that they be dear to me—that they devote time to getting to know me and my needs. They need some understanding and willingness to learn. Their life philosophies matter, caring about the environment and about others. Spirituality is essential. So is balance--knowing when to encourage and when to support. I think lifestyle is the key (24 April 2002).

The anchor homesharer idea is perfect--like a mother helping to keep things running but not being my only friend. I think it is important for the anchor to be older than me but not too old. Build relationship first. The anchor person (or even couple, but no babies!) must know who I am. Yes it's like dating before marriage. The anchor should be organized but flexible. Not like wardens. I need to be central to the house. I know I won't be the only one but the central one. Taking responsibility for my special diet is essential. It is like my hostess. It will be hard to replace E in that way but we must be

ready to accept new ways. I like this conversation. It is fun to imagine my perfect anchor woman! (8 May 2002).

I need good homesharers and friends who listen to and understand me; I need more people to talk with me using S-T. I want them to ask me questions and I can answer them. I need some framework. I want everyone to know it is important that more people try to support me with S-T (12 February 2003).

Having a part-time homesharer this past summer, I felt like I had a companion and a friend. I liked having her live here because it felt like family. I liked knowing that my mother wasn't the only person I could depend on. I became more able to see another person as a companion. I put myself in a position of control. I led the way more. I really liked being out in the community more. I did more and I felt good about it. She was a good fit. I need quiet calm people and lively ones too--lively but not loud! (27 August 2003).

5.2 Understanding My Health

Before I was at MRC I had the sense I was wound up like a top but did not know it could be connected to my diet. I had a turn for the worse with the drugs that I was given at the institution whenever I could not sleep or was a bit excited. Then we had to really get serious about

understanding how bad drugs were for me. I have had no medications at all since then, not even aspirin or painkillers. I do not think I had seizures until after I moved into my new home. Could they have been a late reaction to the drugs? Could my brain have been injured and it took time for the full reaction? I have been told that being home full time allowed my parents to observe me more and to talk to others about how I was feeling.

My family always avoided giving me sugar or other sweeteners or refined grains and we ate healthy food. Some tests in 1996 showed that I was allergic to any foods with wheat and milk in any form. Then it was found that I should avoid anything with gluten or casein as well as potatoes and some other things. So E changed my diet about six months before I moved into my house. I know that the idea of changing my diet made me nervous. How could I live without wheat and milk, I thought? No more bread or ice cream or milk or cookies, or toasted cheese sandwiches. I craved these things but apparently we crave what is bad for us. Later the list grew to include more forbidden foods.[13]

I began to meet dieticians and naturopaths and nutritionists. I had tests where I was connected to a computer and it didn't hurt so I was glad. I do not

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[13] That list was increased to include potatoes, corn, soy, yeast, vinegar, alcohol, tomatoes, sugar, bananas, strawberries and most fruits, coffee, peanuts, chocolate, or food colouring in any form or trace.

like needles. I used to crave the bad things but once they were out of my body I did not any more. I don't really want them any more. And I have learned to love preparing food and cooking.

The real turning point was me enjoying making foods that I could eat. There are still lots of them. For just about everything I eat, we have to cook fresh from basic ingredients, organic if possible. It would be helpful if we could buy alternative foods readymade, but they all seem to include some forbidden ingredients. We wrote a book called *Waverly Foodways* talking about my diet so everyone who came to my house could know the rules. It included lists of foods I can and cannot eat, the principles behind them, and recipes and menus. We also started an organic food co-op, also called Waverly Foodways, so we could buy the basic grains, flours and seeds. And we use organic meats, eggs and vegetables. For two winters, we hosted senior students from the U of G Department of Human Nutrition who worked with me to create menus and recipes. This was quite good, though they tended to plan dishes to suit their own diets and sensitivities rather than mine.

We first met Dr Joan Jory when we hosted a meeting at my home about my diet and autism no-nos. She started to teach us more about nutrients that my body needed but might be missing because of my modified diet, as well as foods I should avoid. She explained the importance of red meats including liver, oily fish like salmon, eggs and lots of

vegetables. Also about the need for supplements like particular vitamins and minerals I wasn't absorbing enough of, even with my good diet. I had to get rid of some toxins too. I had to give lots of blood for analysis. This was traumatic and I really do not want to do it again.

I have a combination of supplements but I cannot name them without prompts. It has taken several years to work out the best combinations and ways of taking them. The supplements have to be pure, with no flavourings, and the powders have to be taken out of their capsule casings. Vitamin B12 was an important addition. I could not accept it by needle. We tried it as lozenges under the tongue but I swallowed too soon. I now take it through the skin where blood vessels are close to the surface.[14] I have periods of adjustment to each new thing. I may be very restless for about a month but then feel the benefits. Since starting the latest form of B12, I have much less brain fog.

Pure Zinc Drink boosts my immune system; it makes me resilient. It also helps my appetite for good food. Sometimes iron agitates me but I need it to get more oxygen for my blood. Mid-afternoon I take a smoothie which is a kind of cocktail of other vitamins and minerals. I also take feverfew daily (as powder in a capsule and as tea with

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[14] We have found it is absorbed best when pure Methylcobalamin is suspended in emu oil cream and compounded specially for me.

chamomile) to ward off migraines and 5-HTP at bedtime to help me sleep. It also helps to have a long bath with Epsom salts before sleep.

Autism seems to come with sensitivities and deficiencies. These barriers in my life have been helped by new ideas about diet and supplements. Dr Jory and others have been bridges getting me closer to good health. However, I still have big seizures every 2-3 months. They started in May 1998. Seizures always take me by surprise: I only know half a second before one grabs my brain and body. After a seizure I need a long sleep. I nearly always wake very clear-headed and focused.

For the past few years, I have been very lucky to have my own family doctor. For almost all my life I have been uncomfortable with and even terrified of medical people and places. My fears got worse when I was held down by staff for taking blood or dental work. Dr Christopher Stemerdink is a really good doctor because he comes to my home and listens to me. I have started letting him examine me. He was recommended by our friends in Burlington who had introduced him to autism. He is about my age and also a runner.

It was Dr Jory who "prescribed" running as an outlet for my agitation and brain fog. She is a marathoner and finds that running helps her. I love the outdoors and am passionate about running. I wish I could run every day. When I feel hyper or stressed running releases me from the tightness for

a while. I feel like an arrow cutting through the fog. I love to walk too, and am good at swimming. All activities depend on having good companions who believe in me. I know it is important to keep up other physical exercises. For some years I had a personal trainer who is now in Spain. Now I try to keep going with stretching and breathing exercises and yoga every day and H supports me. I start every day with reading my weight and my sensory integration routines.[15] We read blood pressure, heart rate and temperature before every meal.

We did not expect to have to focus so much on my health when we started planning my new home. But it has been worthwhile. I feel that my parents have healed me brilliantly. Living in my own home has helped. When I feel well, more of myself is showing through. I have an excellent life. I'm in an inexcellent body though. In the good times, I feel so well it is like a dream. My life is like new. I am just happy to be alive. I am just about the most exuberant person I know. In dreams it is sometimes like I am not autistic.

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[15] Since April 1999, Andrew's sensory routines have included deep brushing of arms, hands, legs, feet and back, then joint compressions according to the Wilbarger protocol, followed by some brain gym exercises. The combination seems to stimulate, ground and focus him. A day goes much better when it begins this way, which probably also reflects the importance of orderly, predictable routines.

But I have to struggle with my body every day. Most of the time now, I can keep things under control and make my body do what my brain wants. But at other times I have tailspins and go spinning downward. I mean losing my body's ability. I can't move. I am rigid. I have been frozen and stuck for up to nine weeks. There have been terrible hyperactive and sleepless times when I can't hold it together. These are less often now that I am so careful with my diet, sensory system and sleep. But anxiety or shock can upset me.

One of the worst things is feeling like my body is not part of me. I seem to be seeing myself from outside and can feel my thoughts are not from my head. I feel unable to sit or stay still. I feel like I need to keep moving or I will get upset. I need to hold my hands over my ears to keep in control of my urges. My brain is rattled. Inside it is jumbled. I feel disoriented. My head is like popcorn. It feels like being in a dark tunnel with no light or air. I can't breathe normally. My chest is tight. I feel jumpy all over, in and out. Hot humid weather can make everything worse.

In the days before a seizure, I can feel in a sad and insecure mood in both body and mind. I think unanchored is a good way to say it. I feel that my brain is in a fog or that there is a hurricane in my head and ears. Just half a second before a seizure, I feel dizzy and light as a feather and know I am about to let go of my awareness. In my seizures, my head feels open like the wind through it. But

after a seizure and a sleep I feel swept clean. No cobwebs. It's like a shock that recharged me. I feel lighter and clear-headed like a fog has lifted.

When I'm worried and not knowing what's happening, I don't think so well. I get agitated. I may do my very awful jumping and yelling and noises. I just have too much anxiety and not enough exercise to get it out. It's worse if people yell at me. It helps to lie under my weighted blanket if I can get there, with books too. Bouncing and rocking can get me out of a stuck place. I like the rhythms of traveling by train. I love the feel of a train. It is motion in my bones. My brain feels liberated. Even a car ride can help. Music is good just about all the time if it is not too loud or high.

I am agitated and jumpy most days at least part of the time. I can control it if things are going smoothly but if things go wrong I can feel it breaking through. Some of my friends have suggested ways to prevent meltdowns and explosions. One idea is listening to my body and knowing when to take breaks and rests. Another is fastening my mind on some person, place, thing or idea that will calm me. I think I can imagine my sister V when I am running or stressed out saying "Calm down Andrew, you can do it." I can hear her.

Other people should know that it is always a struggle, even when there may be no outward sign. We all lose it sometimes in different ways. But we work out coping strategies. For me, my diet,

sensory integration strategies, long walks and other exercise, music, social stories, and understanding friends all help.

5.3 Typing to Talk

Words are our way of reaching each other. In words I tell my story. I say who I am and who you are to me. My words can sail to you or hit their mark like a dart. I tell you I love you or complain if I'm hurt. I'm grateful I found my way to share words, very grateful indeed.

Finding my way to communicate with Supported Typing from 1991 was a key bridge that helped me over some hard times. But after V's death, while I was growing into my new life, I was short of communication partners. H and M had been made to stop supporting people with S-T. Good things were happening and I needed a new experienced facilitator to support me to express my deeper thoughts. E and G continued to support my typing about basic things. But we wanted communication facilitators who were independent of my everyday life so I could comment on it.

My circle of friends met in June 1999 to consider how my communication could be supported. M came to tell us all about the politics. My friends thought it unfair that there were no resources to support an adult like me to express thoughts and needs. So D as my advocate wrote to the

authorities to speak up for my communication rights.

We decided to make a film to help my friends and support workers to understand how I communicate and the challenges I live with. M visited my home several times in early 2000 and G filmed her with me. M explained how the ways I interact and communicate are affected by my movement differences.[16] We reviewed hours of footage and edited it into a video with some scenes also about sensory integration and how I use S-T and other ways of communicating. I started to see I could be a teacher and a leader. *Listening to Andrew* was a big step in building a life for me based on my needs. It showed my capabilities and reminded others to listen to me and not control me. I believe it helped me to begin to express these ideas and to advocate for myself.

In March 2000 B came to visit my home. I was glad because I remembered her from KP. She used to

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[16] These are explained in more recent publications: Donnellan, A., Leary, M. & Patterson Robledo, J. (2006). I can't get started: Stress and the role of movement differences in people with autism. In M.G. Baron, J. Groden, G. Groden & L. Lipsitt (Eds.), *Stress and Coping in Autism.* New York: Oxford University Press. Donnellan, A., Hill, D., & Leary, M. (2010) Rethinking Autism: Implications of sensory and movement differences. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 30, 1 (17 pages). Special issue on autism and neurodiversity, online at http://www.dsq-sds.org/article/view/1060/1225

tell me she knew I was smart. But I had not seen her for more than ten years. In that time we had both learned S-T, B as a facilitator. She asked me if we could try S-T together. I was very agitated that day but did get some words out. We talked enough for me to be really excited and want her to come back soon. B's visit was an example of what E calls serendipity in my life. B became a very important bridge and helped me to speak up for, design and build other bridges. That first month of S-T with B I declared, "The thing everyone yearns for is really good support to communicate."

My S-T abilities improved with B's regular visits although we had some difficulties. I got overwrought often and had to be encouraged and even tricked to get me past the barriers. Maybe, as B has suggested, these tactics were small bridges to get me from my dispirited anxiousness. I was happy to see B always. She encouraged and believed in me but I got overwhelmed with my feelings and doubted my abilities at that time. I recall running away a great deal, and going to the washroom often. I also shrieked and covered my ears and got stuck and could not type or hold B's hand. I remember her counting and massaging my arm and handing me a drink to get my hands away from my ears--then she would grab my hand and we began. These tactics may be examples of what M call accommodations to my movement differences. When I was stuck, encouraging me with words didn't work very well so these things freed me to get moving. B could help by suggesting

that I imagine already doing something. This helps me get started. Silently offering me her hand or the perch sometimes worked but in those early days it was often not enough.

I needed someone by my side to help me develop as a communicator and a thinker. So it was a good thing that B came back into my life. As I typed when we had been meeting for only a month, "A really good facilitator tries to feel everything that I feel. She does the supporting, and pulling back of my hand. I do the moving, pointing, spelling." B was instrumental in encouraging me to keep at it. I understand now that B was not part of an organization or agency, so nobody could make her stop using S-T. Meeting every other week for a couple of hours, B and I have persevered with typing to talk for the past eleven years. Even on hard days, S-T can unlock my frozen body and bridge the gap between stuck and silent and fluid and articulate. I compose and type my own words, but it is part of the dance of my life with my facilitator. J has been my other experienced facilitator for the past two years. She supported me when I composed many of the poems in this book.

In being introduced to a way to communicate deeper thoughts, I began to develop as a person. Before S-T, people knew basically what I wanted or if I was upset. But nobody knew my thoughts. S-T was like being admitted to a university and the more I typed the more my brain power grew. I knew I was smarter than they all assumed. But I

had no experience with higher thought, world issues, and advocating for myself and others. Two barriers were: first, not having a way to express higher thoughts, and second, not using my brain to its fullest until I had a way to express myself.

Once my abilities were revealed, people gave me more input and materials to grow with. I tell my supporters that I want to learn more about various topics. So they get me books and films and we search the Internet to find what I need. I love to copy-type from these materials and learn through several senses. I read the material with my eyes. I feel it as I touch the keys to type it, and I listen to the computer voice saying it back, word by word, sentence by sentence. This is one of my favourite activities. I can do it for hours at a time, just with my dogs and some music for company. I also type social stories and plans in this way.[17] It is interesting that I can copy-type without physical support, but need support when I am composing and typing my own thoughts.

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[17] The Social Story is a strategy developed by Carol Gray from 1991 to help people on the autism spectrum prepare for new experiences and relationships. "A Social Story™ describes a situation, skill, or concept in terms of relevant social cues, perspectives, and common responses in a specifically defined style and format. The goal of a Social Story™ is to share accurate social information in a patient and reassuring manner that is easily understood by its audience." The Gray Center website is at: http://www.thegraycenter.org/social-stories/what-are-social-stories

S-T is an essential bridge in my life. I have composed many statements about what it means to me. It is opening my mind to let others inside to know me and what I think and believe and feel. It feels like a door opens, so the world can understand me, and I have a chance to be in the world—I mean out in the world, as I am, who I am. It is as if the more I communicate, the more I think. In my mind, S-T is the most important exercise I get—for my mind and hands, and also exercising my right to be heard.

I need S-T more often with people who are good at it. Then I could maybe do more independently. I know I am not seen as high-functioning. I think that my definition of high-functioning and the professionals' definition may not be the same. To them it means to be independent, verbal and social. I feel a difference in working with people who believe in me from those who think I'm a charity case. I need that belief to encourage me. The positive energy that comes from another person is enabling. When I work with people who do not believe in me, I get paralyzed and disabled. Negative energy is crippling.

Using S-T gives me the confidence to be myself. I am able to express my ideas about my life and people I want in it rather than just show anxious feelings which lead people to misunderstand me. I think I could give others an impression of not understanding, but with S-T I share deep thoughts

and opinions that surprise many. When asked to give a talk or send my thoughts to a conference, I have become confident that I can almost speak for others. My experiences are my own, but so many people cannot talk for themselves and have not had the opportunities I have had. So if my thoughts open minds and doors, I can be a bridge too. I want everyone to be listened to. I think I have many good things to say if people want to listen. If no one listens nothing can change. We have to keep talking so people keep listening. I think I have an idea to change this. We each need assistants to support our communication all the time or we can't talk. I know this is difficult but we need to make it happen.

These ideas led to our communication support group that we call Bridges-Over-Barriers. My recollection about the birth of "Bridges" is that B brought my friend T and their friend J from Toronto to Guelph to meet me and talk with Supported Typing. That was in January 2004. I had no other friends who typed to talk so it was exciting. I think we were all nervous but happy. I think there may have been more visits to the toilet than actual talking but we did get a chance to exchange some thoughts. I was less nervous than them since it was my home, but I did some running in and out too. I did not imagine from this that we would one day have Bridges-Over-Barriers.

Then we found KM and JMD and their families. KV and his mother published a book about

communication in his life around that time and we invited him and his parents to come to a gathering.[18] Later we were introduced to JK from Michigan. This was the group that really pioneered Bridges, and MM joined us a bit later. We grew close and developed as communicators.

We got together once a month or so and I enjoyed it more than almost anything else. It was exhilarating having a group of real friends, not just sitting in a room together doing puzzles, because we could really share and connect. B or E gave us questions to think about and answer. We talked about being autistic, obsessions and lack of control, and making friends. I think we proved autistics can have feelings for others and can stay focused for a long time. The gatherings were made for us and gave us support and a safe environment to talk. The gatherings were open to people who believed in us and the conversations were about our thoughts and not the facilitators'. At lunch the facilitators and family members and supporters can add their thoughts and share announcements with each other.

We ask guests to come with an open mind. We needed to make this a rule after a sceptical school board administrator came and made some very discouraging remarks without listening to us. It matters because we can't deal with negativity

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[18] Gloria Pearson-Vasey and J. Kevin Vasey, *The Road Trip: Life with Autism* (Novalis, 2005).

around us as well as others can. We autistics have no filters so are bombarded by senses including negative energy from others.

So we have become a group of communicators living with autism and movement difficulties who gather to share and support one another with communication skills, technology ideas, life planning, friendship and community. Bridges-Over-Barriers became the name in 2005 when I suggested "bridges not barriers" and B added "how about 'over' barriers?" A bridge was my image of how S-T can connect my island to the mainland society and overcome my frustrations in being misunderstood and not in control of my life.

I want to build Bridges-Over-Barriers into a centre to help others to communicate. I dream of a place of refuge and organization for S-T and life planning. I want to see more communication training and practice for people. It is about building bridges, not walls. I asked my friends to make donations instead of giving me presents and my friends on the GSA Board kindly agreed to administer funds for Bridges.

We have helped some new communicators to get going with Supported Typing. We want to open people's minds. We want people to see, hear and understand how much communication means to us. S-T is very hard. It strains our bodies and minds. But it is all we have. So it is good to do it and we are glad we can. We need to be helped to

communicate and when we do, it helps us improve our lives. Our biggest project has been planning and producing a DVD and book called *In Our Own Words*.[19]

Groups like ours are rare because we have been assumed not to have thoughts or feelings. We have not been educated or encouraged to express our thoughts. Most of us have been isolated and excluded. Our Bridges group grew over the years. JK moved to New Mexico and later T to Nova Scotia. Our friend R attended gatherings when visiting Guelph for some months but has returned to France. We met J who brought us SL, KR, JC and D who all come from close to Lake Erie. Also SR joined us from Barrie and I from Waterloo. Our newest friend is KG from Peterborough. Our total number of communicators is now about 15. Through our book and DVD we have reached people all over the world.

Bridges is a very special support group. We are all different but very similar in some ways like how we communicate and see the world. I need these friends very much. I am grateful for them all. I love my friends. I need them as much as they need me. They always think I am so special. But they are the

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[19] *Bridges-Over-Barriers: In Our Own Words*, book edited by Andrew Bloomfield, and DVD with same title produced with Christine Zorn, Guelph 2010. Bridges has a webpage at http://www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca/bridges.shtml

ones who bring new ideas each time to build our bridge stronger. I am so happy. I think the Bridges dream will get bigger all the time if we keep talking.

I am passionate about Bridges-Over-Barriers. In December 2006, I said that Bridges gave me a focus and centre of interest, a cause that is important because I believe in myself and my friends. I noted the connections among Bridges members felt like family and even spiritual. It gives me a great sense of purpose to see how much Bridges means to others in the group. We help each other to see the possibilities, speak up and even transform our lives. As in the refrain I composed for the Bridges Song of Hope, "Together we are acceptance, together we are hope, together we are community". I know there are still many more people who need to hear the Bridges message.

5.4 Sharing my Spirit and Gifts in Words and Images

Supported Typing enables me to call for help, say how I am feeling, and choose an activity or path of action. It also lets me share more of my personality and perceptions--what I am really like and what I think matters most for our world.

Through conversations with G and E, and with J or B, I now understand that other people do not naturally know what I am like inside. I used to think that everyone had the same perceptions as I did

and also that others knew what was going on in my head. I believed I could read their minds and thought they could read mine too. I used to wonder why I needed to tell people things when they should know what was in my mind.

Using S-T in more open-ended ways has enabled me to share some of my spirit and values. When I started copy typing, I liked to read and type poems, proverbs and mantras. One famous quotation that spoke to me was from Goethe: "A man should hear a little music, read a little poetry, and see a fine picture every day of his life, in order that worldly cares may not obliterate the sense of the beautiful which God has implanted in the human soul."

Some of my friends shared the wisdom they lived by. I was told that my friend T helped himself through hard times by counting his blessings. I took up this idea of thinking about the positive things in my life as a strategy to cope with my difficulties. So I typed about how my life was more than keeping alive and safe and filling in the time. I added some other needs to the basics, such as things that feed my soul—music, prayer and meditation.

I will say more about some of the ways I may be different from nonautistics. Some of my gifts and qualities might seem surprising to people who don't really know me—my sense of humour, my perception of colour including auras, my expression of thoughts as poetry, my feeling for music, my love of the outdoors and caring for our

environment, and my sense of spirituality. I have composed much more on all these topics. Some is in the poetry section of this book.

Just this month I told G and E for the first time about my **sense of humour**. It may not be obvious to everyone as I find it hard to smile and usually can only laugh out loud when I am distressed. I am a funny man, and I've been called a card. I think I am amused more than people realize.

I think people's faces when they don't understand me are very funny. When I go to the bank people talk to my dog Yukon but they don't know what to say to me and they look funny at me. This is funny not sad. They don't understand but don't try. This seems funny sometimes.

I think G and E are very funny without showing it on their faces. That always makes me smile or chuckle. I enjoy a good laugh just like everyone else but I may not let you know. Sometimes people don't find the same things funny. This is confusing. I like to think about people and the differences we have. This is very funny. People might think I am different but not really who I am different from. People are funny that way. I think people see the differences instead of the person and that is very funny. I don't wish to change people's thinking, just their openness to differences in everyone.

I am not being funny now; this is very serious. I am not laughing now. I wish I didn't have to let others

know this, but it is necessary. Why do others just laugh and it is understood? I want to be a funny man too and maybe people will hear my laughter. I am happy being me; it's just frustrating sometimes having to explain. I think I am done with being so serious. I like being funny. I am a funny man but not peculiar!

I think I perceive things differently and have a strong **sense of colour**. It was a great surprise about 15 months ago to discover that not everyone sees coloured auras around people, the colours seeming to be associated with their personalities. Some of my nonautistic friends may think this is way out, but it is true for me. I have found that most members of our Bridges group also see in colours and can read the minds of people close to them. We have learned there are theories about why a person with autism may see in colours and have a kind of ESP. As we explained in *In Our Own Words* (2010, p.53):

> Some of us may experience a blending of senses or synaesthesia. Seeing something may also bring a strong sensation of odour or taste. Or when we hear a sound or word or name, we may see a particular colour. This may explain why some of us are artists or express ourselves in poetic metaphors.
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> Perhaps some of our senses are over-developed and hypersensitive because other parts of our sensory and nervous systems are not so well developed. Most of us have not

been formally educated, as people did not think we were intelligent enough. Our sensing instincts may still be more alive, as they were in earlier times of human development or as they may be in very young children.

Because we cannot speak with our voices and may have different ways of perceiving what we see and hear, we may be compensating with some special senses. As well as being hypersensitive, we may have special abilities with music, numbers, memory, shapes, visual arts and words. People with autism are thought to find face recognition hard. So perhaps it is good that we can sense personal qualities through our recognition of the coloured auras we see around people.

Painting with H gives me great joy. My Green Man painting (used on the cover) shows a forest and a man who is green and of the earth. It represents to me trying to stay connected to the earth. I am peering out from my own forest. I find it easier to express my idea of a painting in words with S-T than to achieve the painting with brush and paints. I wish there could be some way of stabilizing my arm and body so I could paint what is in my mind.

I love words and metaphors and expressing my thoughts in poetry. Once I became fluent with S-T, B noticed that I had a poet's way with words. I knew my thoughts were developing. B encouraged

me to think of myself as a poet because she said I phrased things poetically. I did not know that. I was told to let the words flow and they did indeed. I like to think of myself as a writer but it surprises me that it is seen as poetry. I learned that a poem is an image with words arranged in a pleasing way.

My first poem was in December 2002. It was for my friend K whose horses I worked with. After I composed it, I typed "I like to write poems. It is like a song in my mind." My first four poems were then set to music by Sunny. They were all different in mood and tone. Hearing my poems as songs encouraged me to do more. In summer 2004, I typed: "I am learning to be a poet. My words begin in my heart and go to my head. I let them flow on out of my hands, with the stabilizing hand of my facilitator, on to the keyboard, and out comes the voice. Not my voice, but as close as I will get to reciting my poems out loud." By fall 2006, I had composed 38 poems to match the years of my age. We published these in a collection called *In My Mind: Thoughts and Words of Andrew Bloomfield*.

I find that expressing my thoughts in words and metaphors is relaxing and refreshing, not as emphatic as my prose messages. I think my brain likes it. I think the right side of my brain is getting exercise while writing poems, and when I am copy-typing it is the other side. I am not verbal with my voice but I love words and have language I can express with S-T. I think my poems surprise people because they are not just functional expressions of

my needs. I did not organize my thoughts before S-T, so images were randomly thought then.

I have learned I had a great-uncle seven generations back who was a poet. He was Robert Bloomfield, "the Suffolk Poet". Much better thing to inherit in my genes for a change! My grrrrrreat grandfather Isaac put his brother's poems to music and a couple of hundred years later my friend Sunny put my poems to music too! I don't rhyme but my ancestor did and he recited his poems. He could carry 100 lines in his head. I also do something like that, saving my words and images in my head for a time when I have support to type them out. I like the idea of spreading our Bridges messages through poetry.

How do my poems emerge? Sometimes I have a thought that percolates for a long time in my thoughts and then it explodes out of my head. I have many many things I'm thinking going on at once. It is sometimes too much--almost funny because I can't hear it all at once. I have an idea about the poems. I do like to tell my thoughts in a story. Some call it a poem. I call it my life. Poems are an expression of my thoughts. It is just me sharing my good insight on ideas I have. I always had thoughts, but just couldn't express them. I was always happy with my life but locked inside with too many ideas. People knew AB on the outside but not the man inside. I now let people know and I feel so fulfilled. I am full of many thoughts on this. At times I am ready to explode with ideas.

When I get my next chance I tell E and B or J that I want to type it out. In each communication session, I am asked if I want to type a poem. Sometimes I am not in a poetic mood. Sometimes I compose a whole poem, but I may just type some lines and keywords for a poem to be completed another time. A topic may be suggested and I just open up my mind and the words come pouring out. I get the computer or E to say it back to me, and I decide on a title. Almost always I like poem the way it is and we make no changes. Occasionally I may change just one word. I am not interested in fitting my words to a format like a haiku or sonnet. I don't like rhyming at the ends of lines as I find it alters the meaning.

In the early years of S-T my mind was more black and white and I thought more literally. Since 2000 all my typing and talking to others have made me less rigid in my thinking. Now my mind feels it is exploding with ideas and images full of colour.

A young friend asked me recently what one thing I might wish for. I wish I could speak with my voice but it is not in my control. I feel it is unfortunate I cannot illustrate my words with intonation and hand gestures. I think it is emphasis and colour that are missing. I feel deep dark regret that I cannot illustrate my words. Perhaps my poetry helps to bridge this gap.

Music is very important to me. I love music and wish I could play and sing so people would recognize the tune or song. I have some great music friends who have helped me to understand how rhythm can be used to overcome or make up for some of my movement differences and the ups and down in my health. Rhythm can come from words, music, dance and other forms of exercise. I like to have music playing just about all the time except when I am asleep. All my life, when I was upset and in danger of a meltdown, certain pieces of classical music could calm me.

I feel moved by music. It feels as if music makes my body move. It makes my body work smoothly. Without music my body feels numb. I can do without it but it makes things work better for me. Music is an important and beneficial part of my life. I like it every day. I think music can be used to help me get unstuck and to move without anyone telling me. I prefer more lively music on a good day. When I'm really agitated ocean wave sounds are good.

However, it is important that music is part of my life but not all it is about. Music is a big part of being included with other people—it is more than just music in my life. Music is important to many people. Through music I can be part of what others are interested in. Through sharing music we are all friends.

We have viewed the DVD *The Music Instinct: Science and Song* and read the associated book by

Daniel Levitin. I was very surprised to hear that autistics are considered to be utterly incapable of hearing the emotions in music or being emotionally affected by music. Perhaps it is the rhythm, structure and harmony that I like most in music. But I also think that music affects me emotionally.

"Sunny" came into my life in autumn 2002 and it really was like sunshine. I was so pleased to have a new friend like her--musical and spiritual and gentle and kind. She came here from Korea with her husband to go to university. She wanted to be a music therapist with autistic people. I liked her right away but needed to get used to her. I loved listening to her play piano, guitar and drums. She admired my poems and put some to music. First was my poem about my friendship with K and it was lovely. Sunny put three more poems to music—"My Amy", "Spring", and "What it's like to be me". I tried to make music with her and she patiently and warmly encouraged me. After we had met occasionally for three months, I typed "Music is good for my soul. The creating, the release of ideas and feelings, and hearing the music. No right or wrong, just feeling it and doing it. I like the completing of the musical thought."

Sunny left to go back to Korea when she had her baby and after her husband finished school. I have many memories of special moments with her. I was very sad when she left. But in Korea she transferred what she learned about autism from me and opened a therapy centre that is partly

inspired by my life. She keeps in touch with us and visits every second year. She is just one of my music friends, but we have a wonderful bond. Sunny and I were bridges for each other. I was her bridge to Canadians and autism, she was my bridge to music and the idea my poems could be songs.

I am passionate about gardens, woods, plants of all kinds and all things green. In planning my home we decided my ability to help in the garden could be expanded. I worked with G in building the raised beds and with E in planting and tending the gardens. In the Spirit Valley woods I had worked with G and AF, trimming trees on the paths. So we knew I could help and that I liked working outside. I liked working with silent tools not motorized. I used a push mower and hand tools.

Since I have lived in my own home, my garden and the environment have become very important to me. I met L about four years ago because she was the horticultural therapist at the Guelph Enabling Garden. I liked it there but there was too much distraction for me to wander off. So L came to my house and we began growing and tending plants and then harvesting and using them. We plant seeds in the winter and keep the seedlings under grow lights then in the spring they go into pots or the ground. I like to make things for my friends from my garden.

In horticulture I think just being with plants is therapeutic but L's way with special people is what

makes her a therapist. I don't usually like the terms music "therapy" or art "therapy". Rather I want people to do those things with me. But horticulture really can be therapy. I have learned a lot from working with L. She is interested in my thoughts and poems and wants to support me with communication.

L has taught me that we can train our senses to meditate and communicate with nature. For example I tried communicating with a plant in my home garden. It was the black pod shoo fly. I chose it because of its unusual colour and shape and as a metaphor: beautiful but toxic. I chose it being unique myself too. What did the plant say to my emotions and heart? Delight is best word. It speaks to my visual and intellectual senses. How did I find meditating and communicating with a plant calmed my brain and hyper-reactive senses? I find that it is the whole garden that does this, not one plant.

Before 1996, I used to say I wanted to live and work on a farm. I was inspired by Spirit Valley and other farms I knew and by my love of the outdoors and open spaces and my feeling of identifying with horses. We thought about this carefully when planning my new home, but eventually chose a spacious suburban house with a large garden. I do not think I could imagine, before I came here, that my house could satisfy my desire to live on a farm, but it has become like the Garden of Eden.

The idea of a farm came from visits to Bittersweet Farms and Camphill. Later I met D at his farm which I liked because it is centred on people. D enables people to participate how they are, not changing them. It is a welcoming place. It is therapeutic but it is doing work with garden and animals, not the therapist that makes it therapeutic. I might have liked to live at Bittersweet because they are good at being self-sustaining--working to grow and look after things together, to live on. The down side of such a farm community would have been that living with many others might not have been good for me. I am remembering flashes of my visits to all those places and they are good memories. But I do not mind now that I did not go to live on a farm.

Spirituality is important to me. I agree with my Bridges friend KV that "people with autism and disabilities are more in tune with spiritual things because their world is silent and their hearts are open". I think that autistic people need spiritual care. This is how I expressed my spiritual sense for an article in *The Presbyterian Record* in May 2005:

> By seeing the miracles all around and counting my blessings, I feel a sense of spirituality in my soul. Our lives are very soulful. We listen in our family. I think I am often in the presence of spiritual people, so it rubs off. I think I hear an inner voice in my head that is from a higher being. I know that I relate to the world, and to the energy of others, and that we are all connected. I mean that it might be God or it might be my

> connection with others, but I must be still and listen.[20]

I was a teenager when I first felt a sense of awe, that there were miracles all around me. I didn't always see them. It is good to be in a spiritual place. I feel a sense of awe at times outdoors, in the country. Natural outdoor places and gardens of harmony and beauty make it easier for me to listen. Spirit Valley has inspired me for 20 years. When we trimmed the conifers in the woods there, it felt like a cathedral. My gardens are heaven on earth. Our Bridges gatherings are often at Ignatius which is a sanctuary--a place of quiet peace, of God and nature and history.

I think spirituality is something we grow into and it changes. In the earlier years I had enjoyed the time in some church visits but it was hard to deal with my anxiety and sensory differences. I think we had a church when I was small and I liked the quiet and the music. The down side was I felt judged for my behaviour. So we were tense as a family. I could not be quiet or sit still, so we stopped going. People were disapproving, so we felt unwanted. I understand that we were new in Canada and had

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[20] "Loving people is loving God: An autistic man talks about spirituality" with Andrew Foster, *The Presbyterian Record*, May 2005. http://www.presbyterianrecord.ca/2005/05/01/loving-people-is-loving-god/ The spiritual sense of people with autism is explored by William Stillman in *Autism and the God Connection* (2006).

no support circle yet. In the end V went with E and I stayed home with G. We did not know how to create a circle at church yet. I got to spend time with G though and we read a lot. It is too bad I could not have a church community around me. I might have made friends and enjoyed the benefits of connecting to my spirituality earlier.

I think I developed a sense through spiritual friends. I think I heard how they talked and that they connected to a higher being and I tried to reach into my soul to see what that was about. I found that if I am quiet or listen to special soulful music I feel my spirit soars.

When I first wrote about spirituality, I wanted a church to go to. I wanted to be included. I know God is everywhere, but church makes it easier to connect. I might still like to visit a church service. I love to go to the big Catholic church when it is empty. It is quiet and I feel a sense of something godly. I think autistic people should search for a church that has the right lighting and not harsh noises or bright colours. Our sensory needs make it important to check the church for the right environment. I like older churches because there is soft lighting and stone and wood that are absorbing the sounds. Maybe I feel an uplifting energy in an old church. High ceilings seem to make my spirit feel it can rise to heaven.

But gardens and forests are good places to look for God too. I feel it is easy to find God when I work in

the garden. Where did butterflies and birds come from, if not from God? I know that there was evolution but I wonder how it all started. I feel there was a God with a master plan. I do not now how it works but I think it is all very miraculous.

'Loving people is loving God'. I heard that and adopted it some time ago. If we are supposed to be made in the image of God we should love each other, shouldn't we? I think God does not look like anyone. He is a spirit. Don't be surprised. Just because I didn't go to Sunday school, I have been around for 40 years or more. I know people try to say their way of worship is the right way. But I have friends with different beliefs--so how can only one of them be right? I don't know how anyone can tell someone else what to believe. We have different relationships with each other, right? So of course we have different relationships with God. I don't think you have to belong to a religion to feel spiritual, but it helps some I know.

I wonder if my sense of spirituality is related to my other special senses—including empathy, mind reading, seeing auras and in colour, hyper-acute hearing? I am connecting more and more with other people through mind reading and seeing auras. I think these are gifts I have that help make up for my autistic challenges.

I have been more able to empathize with others as I come to understand the world more. I always cared if my family were sad or hurt, but beyond

them only in more recent years. I am able to listen more and hear what others feel so I can say "How would I feel?" My growing ability to be sensitive to others may be a way of growing more spiritual. Loving people is a way of loving God.

5.5 Friends and Community

In becoming a home owner I have been shown by G and E the importance of being involved in my community. I vote of course and I have helped political candidates in local, provincial and federal elections. I have chosen to put signs on my lawn and deliver flyers.

For ten years I was local captain of Neighbourhood Watch which meant I kept my eyes open to be sure all is well in my neighbourhood. We recorded when new people moved in so we could know our neighbours. We welcomed them by going to say hello. My beautiful garden also connects people to me as they stop and admire it and we talk to them.

I am easily recognized around my neighbourhood because I always have one or two magnificent dogs. They are in my plan because I am in need of companionship and they hold me to the path. I can have more independence and dignity and need not be supervised all the time by other people. I have volunteered with Amy at a large seniors' home. We offered pet therapy. That means it makes the older people feel happier to see the dogs. It makes me happy to know I can help someone else because I have to receive help from so many myself. I think

they liked Amy more than me. I don't talk or smile or kiss them. Amy wagged and licked so her communication skills were warmer than mine. Now I have my young dog Yukon as well and Amy has been training him. He is even more exuberant at kissing and licking.

My dogs stay with me all the time. I feed them and look after them. I like being responsible. They know my signs and sounds and my moods. They bark when someone they may not know comes to the door. Yukon is very good at knowing if I am not well and stays close by. My dogs can call people if I need help. We can be in another part of my home for two hours or so. We can look after the house for short times. Holding on to my dogs helps my sense of balance and makes me more comfortable in new or strange situations.[21]

We can go anywhere together, as we have a special card saying we are a licensed Public Access Team. Most of our outings are walks, but we also drive to banks, stores, malls and libraries by car. Sometimes we park on the edge of downtown and then have a good walk around the streets. We could also go on buses and trains. Only my running is not so good

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[21] Andrew's service/companion dogs, both Golden Retrievers, were trained specially for him by National Service Dogs, a charitable organization based in Cambridge Ontario. Amy joined Andrew's household in November 1999 at the age of 20 months, and Yukon came in May 2009 when he was nearly two years old.

for them. Walking is important to me because I love to be outside. I need to walk every day and so do Yukon and Amy. I like to choose the routes and to be independent for part of the way. I need time alone to talk to Yukon and Amy. I say "Thank you for being my friends. I love you both".

I think my dogs bridge the gap between me and the rest of the world. I mean to say that they alert me to the presence of others and their appearance makes others want to interact with me. I look after them and having to do that makes me stay more aware of traffic and hazards on my way. My dogs are my friendmakers. They are so cute and friendly, and people who might be nervous about talking to me are drawn to them. They are not the same as guide dogs who you mustn't talk to.

I am involved in my community in various ways. We have supported the Enabling Garden and the Ignatius Centre of Spirituality and Ecology. We host the organic food co op called Waverly Foodways. I have helped at the U of G doing collating, and have worked as well for the Historical Society, autism support groups, and Wildlife Preservation Canada. They were appreciative but I didn't make new friends. I am a PR ambassador but there are not too many friends I make on my own. I am told that it's not just people with autism who may find this hard. I guess I did not know neurotypicals are having friend problems too.

Real friendship has developed with some of my

former workers and my FAB. We have friends over for meals. Walking and running are ways I can spend time with friends on an equal basis. I run with T's husband whose name also begins with T. My friend T was my tutor when I first came to my house and now she and T want to stay in my life and my neighbourhood.

I guess there is wisdom in doing things with others you have common interests with and friendship sometimes grows. I have learned that friendship goes two ways. It is give and take and, like a bridge, has to reach both sides. I help people with their causes and they help me with mine--like Bridges. I have been giving money to Africa and other suffering parts of the world. My art friend H helps me be creative and make cards for others.

I like to do things that are active but have meaning and to do them with friends. Being with people successfully is half about the activity and half about who I do it with. Being with my Bridges friends was harder at first because the activity was not so active. We just sat and talked and that took practice but there was good support for us so we grew into it. Sometimes an activity like walking or art or music helps us connect with one another.

K is another good example. We got to be friends by working together with the horses. K loves horses and invited me to work at Spirit Valley with her. We groomed horses and fed them and cleaned stalls. She became a wonderful friend--kind and

encouraging and nurturing. She told me I was perrrrfect. I love the way she rolled the rrrrs. She became like a new sister. Nobody could replace V but she is a new kind of sister. K (another one) and S also seemed like sisters when they stayed in my home for two different summers to help me feel what homesharing would be like.

I know that people with disabilities are expected to take on very low-paid menial jobs. I have done some of that kind of work in sheltered workshops. Paid work to me just means being valued. I don't need the money. I feel many things I do are very valued and they have meaning to me. I did not like the workshop at MRC but delivering catalogues was fine. I could be in charge of keeping a kitchen orderly. Or a library. I could keep a copy room tidy. Mail room sorting would be a good job for me too. I like collating--it is calming work.

I think I contribute to my community with the volunteering I do, and as a model and pioneer in creating a good whole life in my own home and neighbourhood. We invite people to come see my home. I think these contacts help people not to be afraid of me and other autistics. Starting Bridges-Over-Barriers with the help of G and E is another contribution. I have gone along with other people's "make work" activities for me but I think I have tried enough of these unless they are very well thought out and I have really strong allies. I have plenty to do now!

Now that I have my own home I take pride in being a host. It makes people feel welcomed when we fuss over them. I like to show them my house and the gardens and bake cakes, cookies and muffins sometimes. We have had guests from all over Ontario, Alberta, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, BC, Ireland, Korea, New Zealand, United States and France. We also host various sorts of meetings.

We plan all the visits so I know what to expect and so do the visitors. It is good to know the plan and having a walk is usually a good part to include. Getting to know someone on a walk is easier for me than sitting still in the house. New people can be stressful if I think they might judge me or not appreciate me. I get nervous and then agitated and end up embarrassing myself with behaviours I can't control. If we walk I have the dogs and a focus that calms me. My house is also good because there is a relaxing room near the living room so I can go and calm down but still hear the conversation. My relaxation room has green plants, a couch and my weighted blanket. Yukon will come and lie on my legs and that helps to ground me. Going to walk in the garden helps too, if I need a break.

Some people have stayed overnight or for a weekend or longer. My cousins came from New Zealand last year and I was excited and nervous. We planned time for G to take them on drives around the area and other times with me. I kept some of my regular routine which was good. My friend Sunny from Korea has also been my guest

three times. This year she was here for a week with her son aged 7. She likes to observe and take part in my activities and to talk about her therapy centre in Korea.

Some people who are thinking of having a home of their own have stayed over one or two nights to learn from me. My house has space for me separate from guests so it works very well. I might have been nervous about the idea of them staying overnight but when in my room all is normal.

Some guests come just for a visit and a meal. It is always a special day when my Bridges friends come for gatherings are at my house. Every visit is different. Some work better than others but I love to host people in my home. So we try and learn.

I need to get to know people before I consider them friends. I need people to respect me as a whole person. Don't just pick out what you like about me. People may see what they want, not what the person wants. This gets difficult. I want people to respect me, all of me, and those who know me do. I need to be real. Being me is the best I can be. I try myself to be always polite. I always try to see both sides.

5.6 My Aroha and Circle of Friends

My good life depends on my friends. I need them to listen to me, believe in my gifts and abilities, and support my good life. My friends comfort and inspire me with words. As one friend wrote in my

birthday card last time "true friends are those who lift you when your heart's wings forget how to fly".

By 2000 my life plan was unfolding well. My occupancy of my own home was supported legally by a housing trust. I was regularly typing to talk. My good life revolved around me and I was involved in any decisions that affected me.

But in some of my early S-T sessions with B in 2000, I typed about my nightmares when I would wake up in the night, very anxious about how my life would be supported and what would become of me if G and E became ill or died. For example:

> I am terrified when night comes and I fear that I will be left alone. The thing I am scared about is seeing the day my parents die. I believe that we get things moving. I really want to feel secure, to know who will live here. I need to make and keep friends. How can I find friends to share interests, spend time with me, and not depend so much on Gerry and Elizabeth? I'm concerned about my future security. I need to know my means of support. I need to know that there is a safety system (10 April 2000; 8 November 2000; 23 November 2000).

G and E were glad that I was able to express my fears and that I wanted to be involved in planning for the future. My circle of friends responded to my cry for help by meeting to think through with me the qualities of people I need to support me. John

Lord told us about microboards in western Canada and my friends thought we should look into these. GSA hosted some events for people from all over Ontario with presentations by the man who first thought up the microboard in Manitoba.

We also studied anything else people had done. We decided to go ahead and incorporate a small support organization like a microboard for me. We could not use the word microboard in Ontario. So we thought of Aroha instead as the general name. It is a great Aotearoa/New Zealand word meaning sustaining love, friendship, community and caring. For the particular name of my Aroha we chose Friends of Andrew Bloomfield (FAB for short). FAB is the core of my circle of friends and has special powers because it is legally incorporated.[22] The generic name for this kind of entity in the United States is self-directed support corporation (SSDC).

My Aroha is a creative way to keep up my good life as we had designed it after G and E are gone. I am one director and so are G and E now. There are three other directors who are very good friends of

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[22] For more about the functions of Aroha entities, see Sections B and D of *Creating a Home and Good Life of My Own: Strategies and formal agreements developed by Guelph Services for the Autistic in its role as housing trust*. Edited by Elizabeth & Gerald Bloomfield, 2008. See more information at this webpage: http://www.uoguelph.ca/oaar/aroha.shtml

various ages, talents and life experiences. They are the core members of my circle of friends and can call on others to help in the future.

I like my friends to visit and share my life in ones, twos and small groups. But we also have had some larger FAB gatherings including a FAB dinner party, a FAB garden party and groups to discuss important issues. People stimulate one another to come up with bright ideas for new friends or activities. FAB friends have helped me to interview new support people. Another time we had a terrific discussion of the qualities of homesharers who might live here as supportive companions.

I feel good knowing about my Aroha. I know my future is safer. I feel safer knowing that my Aroha would be in charge with me, not some strangers. I'm proud I am a pioneer. I'm glad I can express this.

I have many people in my life now, so the future looks better than when I had the nightmares in 2000. Thank goodness for Supported-Typing and my friends who listen to my words.

6 Looking Forward

I have been composing my autobiography to make sense of what has happened and to be clear about the most important things that must continue. I have been thinking of the biggest barriers and the most helpful bridges for me.

Biggest barriers:

- Movement differences, getting stuck and being hyper, and especially not being able to speak.
- Some misunderstandings of my abilities and negative attitudes by others.
- Times of living away from home and family.
- Times of ill-health including seizures.
- Missed opportunities to learn and relate to typical children and young adults.

Best bridges in my life:

- V my twin sister and best friend crossed the lines first so I could follow and was a bridge to typical kids, the community and the world.
- My parents E and G have always been the most important bridges in my life. The early barriers were never their faults. We just had much to learn and they went to no limits to find new ways to help me. They talked to experts until they were the experts others talked to. They organize things to make all my good life happen.
- My own home constructed around my needs and knowing I can control my life.

- A sense of security for the future, thanks to my FAB and GSA friends.
- Supported Typing and my facilitators.
- Bridges-Over-Barriers connecting me with those who use and advocate for Supported Typing.
- Supportive friends and enriching activities like running, learning, writing poems, music, painting.
- Gardening in my home and outside so it looks like a paradise of green.
- My dogs to care for and be my companions, making bridges for me with my community.
- Understanding and restoring my health, including diet, sensory integration, exercise.
- Social stories to prepare for new situations and relationships.
- Lifelong learning through copy-typing and DVDs.
- Friends who take time to know me and help others to understand my gifts and challenges.

What am I proud of achieving in my first 43 years?

- I have my home.
- I can express myself in words and this has helped everything in my life.
- I tell others about my ideas through poems.
- I make decisions about my present and future.
- I am an artist and love to paint.
- I have learned to be a friend. I feel for others and I let them know.
- I am joyful and I want to share it. I feel it is my responsibility to help others now.
- Bridges-Over-Barriers has extended the family I have with more friends all the time.

- **What makes a perfect day?**
- Walking with my dogs. I love to go to the river. I prefer paths to roads. I like parts of walks on my own but I prefer E's humming to be heard. This keeps me on the path. I don't like walking and talking at the same time; I think it hurts to have too many thoughts at one time.
- Running whenever I have a running friend.
- Daily stretching, brushing, brain gym and ET.
- Good food to eat and my tea and drinks and supplements.
- Knowing what is happening and what I am going to do. I try to make it keep my life going even if there are surprises but it is hard that way.
- Knowing that someone is here so I am not alone. I need a person somewhere in my home but I also like times on my own just with my dogs.
- Copy typing every day as I like to read and learn this way and by watching DVDs.
- Music on all the time except when I sleep. I like to sing to my music—but I'm not a good voice yet!
- Being outside whenever the weather allows, and gardening and working with plants.
- Doing chores like dishes, laundry, keeping the house tidy and taking out the garbage.
- Cool days and nights, rests when I need them and a good sleep at night after my bath.
- Seeing my supporters like H and L regularly.
- Enjoying conversations, as well as S-T times, in the room with E and G both as we do.
- Seeing different people but I don't like to have a lot of people in my house if it gets loud.

- Having my words heard. If I don't like something I might not be able to let you know. I try to endure hard things I don't like. I try my best always. I really need continued communication support to direct my life and also supporters and friends who "listen" to me. Without it everything else would collapse once G and E are not around.

I sometimes think about the hard times of my life and wonder "what if" some things had been different. But I cannot change anything. I wish V was here but I know the time we did have together was very good. I may not have been as ambitious about my life if I had always had V to encourage me. I think I was following her, not trying my very best. I needed to do for myself. She always told me to try--now I do. I miss her but the memories I always have it will be part of my thoughts every day. I don't regret any of my life.

I could wish to have escaped the terrible times away from home when drugs were tried and I had bad reactions. But we wouldn't have known that unless we tried. It was hard but not all bad. Everything takes time to work out. I don't like the wait, but it is worth it when I get there. I think I wouldn't have met all the good people I have in my life now if I hadn't had all the things happen. The things I have now make me a very happy green man. I am happy I had the things offered to me. I am glad I am in Guelph. Yes I think it is a journey worth traveling.

I need to stop thinking about my past and focus on my future. I learned from remembering my past life but now I am a man. Now it is time to look to the future. The bridges have been many but not easy to build over the many barriers. We always need to be aware that my health can be a barrier to functioning in the world; the things we do to keep me well must be maintained. Nothing will ever be perfect in the world but the limitations from other people's attitudes are still a barrier. We have not built enough bridges yet. I am aware as a man who is autistic that I will never be fully independent but I can keep working with others to build the bridges I need to be interdependent at least. Independence is less of a goal for me now and that is fine.

I am feeling very positive about the future. I am happy I can think about the past and feel good about it. I have grown and become the man I know I am meant to be. I want to be known as Andrew Bloomfield, not just the man with the dogs. I like people to know me and my name. I love my good life. I am not sure how I made it here without being the man in the other room. I am the man in the room, not just a man in the other room. I was not in the room before or I was, but not seen. I am now Andrew who belongs in the room. I am a good man with good new things in my life. Yes I am Andrew who is a new man with new things in my life that make me a person. I am a new man because I let the past shape me. It was not easy but made me strong. It is a good life now. I think my life was always good but just not seen that way by others.

My need for support is one bridged thing but I do need space and chances to do things for myself. This doing things for myself can be a source of pride and satisfaction. New people in my life will always need to learn how to balance supporting me and being a bridge to help me connect myself to others. This is sometimes hard for people to get. You don't need to carry me over the bridge, just walk by my side.

I know that my house will continue to be here with the roof over my head but my parents will be gone one day. I will continue to use the bridges provided by my dogs and friends and facilitators to get my life ready to be on my own. I know I will not really be on my own; it is a figure of speech.

My voice being listened to is so important. S-T is a bridge to get my real words out to be heard. My life has been so profoundly improved since I learned how to get my words out of my head and the facilitators like B and J and E and J are still so central to my talking to others. I would like to need the physical support less but that may never come to be possible. My life is always an evolving organism so one never knows for sure.

My Aroha and I will one day have to operate without G and E. I know I need to prepare my mind for a change but I don't like that idea much. My life is the best now. I would rather it not change. I just want all things in my good life to continue. I need

to keep expanding my circles of friends. Friends who support and love me hold everything up so I can cross bridges from my home to the world. We have learned much and continue to do so with bridges in my life.

I have learned that friendship can be built with other autistic people and that we have much to give to each other. I hope my Aroha friends will also keep me connected to this vital group of Bridges-Over-Barriers friends. I want to work on my dream for a Bridges centre. I am hoping it will happen. Bridges is getting bigger and more people need to be able to experience real communication. I feel we could share it with so many. I want to see things happen fast. I need to slow down. I have many years to do all this. I will have so many friends I will have to get a bigger heart to love them all.

Bridges over barriers

One might be stuck on the side lines
with the barriers encountered.
I have been fortunate
--No I have been blessed--
with so many bridges
to cross over and around the obstacles.

My body in and of itself
has given me barriers to deal with
-- brain chemistry and stuck-in-the-mud body--
but not ever letting it stop me.

There is always a path
we can carve around a road block
or a bridge to be built
over the bump in the road.

My bumps are the kind
that have been debilitating;
my barriers sometimes created
by limited thinking of others;
the hardest ones are those we cannot control.
But never is a barrier insurmountable.

Positive thinking and enabling friends,
family that never give up,
and facilitating dear ones are my bridges
from the island to the mainland
and over the holes and gaps
and troubling walls
that would impede me.

Nothing will ever make my body
the way I might wish it to be;
nothing may ever make my mind
free as a bird.

But I am not in jail as long as there are
bridge-building partners
to help me over the barriers.
(17 Aug 2011)

Poetry, 2006-2011

Family and Friends

My life as a Bloomfield

3 Jun 2011

I am a unique and interesting man.
I come from strong opinions.
My life was given to me to share.

My sister was and is my best friend.
Parents give me my intelligence and mind.
They give me hope to be my best.
My life is full of dreams.
My family form my thoughts
and ideas on what I want to be.

I can always be myself.
I am an individual
with my own ideas,
but family gives me a start
to form my opinions
with strength and humour.

I am who I am
because a person believed in me.
I am a Bloomfield.

Memories of Vickie

9 Jun 2010

Vickie comes to me in my dreams.
We are small and playing.
She is the leader and I the follower.

I do not remember these moments
until I awaken
but when I open my eyes
I know they are real.

She was my first running mate.
She set the course and I kept up.
Being able to see Vick in my dreams
is a way to have a visit with her.

Dreaming about Vickie
is to go back in time
and believe she is not gone.

Calling my name she could
bring me out to the present.
Being with my sister was like
having a bridge
to connect me to others.

Dreams of my sister

9 Jul 2010

I see my friend,
I feel her touch,
I know she's here with me.

My dreams seem real,
I remember fun,
I feel water on my face,
I play the games,
I know we have a special friendship.

I feel sad not having her here,
I remember reading,
I dream of good times together,
I have wind blowing on my face.
Run. I run. I am noisy.
I am free to be me with my friend.

I love my memories,
I feel peace of mind when I feel
memories of a friend.
She was not only my sister
but my closest friend.

I know she does see me now,
I still feel her hand in mine.
She is always here:
a friend sharing life and experiences.

Vickie is now on my mind as always,
Her memory is clear and special.

Always my friend

16 Jul 2010

Laughter and smiles,
Time and energy,
Supportive and caring,
Intelligent and insightful,
Carefree and courageous,
Artistic and creative.

Encouraging and non judgmental,
Patient but persistent.
Adventurer and explorer,
Passionate for life,
Believing in me,
Loving and dependable,
Always my friend,
My sister Vickie.

I feel good expressing
my feelings of who Vickie is:
she will always be with me.

A poem about Dads

13 Dec 2006

I think you know, my friend,
that fathers are important.
I know you know this is so.

You visit your father
as he lies in his last days
and I think I can imagine
you holding his hand.

You touch him, I know,
in your company,
and you touch, I hear,
in lovingly caring for him.

He is the only father you have:
our fathers cared for us,
and we care for them,
in the end.

Gerry's birthday

9 Apr 2008

It is your birthday,
My father my friend.
You deserve gifts,
You give so many things to others.
My gift to you
is my promise
to make you proud.
My gift to you
is to be like you
in doing for others as you do.

Father's Day poem for Gerry

15 Jun 2011

Gerry is a father like no other.
I have not played football
like some sons
or hockey or golf.
But he has been
gently loving me
as I am.

Gerry is a father
who shares his time
and teaches me about the things
that enhance my life.
Gerry loves me and shows me
in ways that make a difference.
He takes me out into the world.
Gerry is my father.
Gerry is my bridge.

My mother

21 Apr 2010

A woman called Elizabeth,
my mother is like no other.
She is captain of our ship,
head nurse and caregiver,
and advocate for me on every front.

My mother is called Elizabeth
but she should have the name
of a famous goddess,
like Athena or Isis:
a beautiful mixture
of strength and gentleness.

My mother is called Elizabeth
but I just call her E.
No name is big enough to describe her.
No name could say it all.

My mother is just my mother
when I am unwell,
and my greatest hero
on all the other days.

Circles in my life

26 Nov 2008

Life is complicated,
and I need different friends
for different parts of me.

Aroha friends support my life
and will be in my future.

Bridges friends help support
my way to communicate
and express my thoughts and needs.

Friends who support my daily life
are such dear companions.

S-T facilitators are
important and special:
they help to connect me
to my other friendship circles.

Elizabeth and Gerry are
my life partners,
my parents,
my perfect advocates.

Friends complete my circle

28 Dec 2009

I am learning new things from new people.
I am surrounded by people
who are interested in me.
I have extended my Aroha
to a circle of new friends.
This is an enriching experience for us all.
I feel overwhelmed with new things,
but new friends make this circle
a path of smooth tolerance.

I can learn new things.
I can try new things.
I can teach and mentor others.
I can be a new person with new people.
When they are accepting of me,
this makes them not just new people
but new friends.

I enjoy new things now
because new friends have taught me
to accept me, myself,
just as they have accepted me.
New friends are new allies
and complete my circle of supports.

I need new friends to continue to grow,
whether with music, art,
plants, running, communicating,
or just being there.
They are a pathway to my growth:
Friends complete my circle.

My Health

My body betrays me
21 Feb 2007
Bodies please us,
but not always,
when we need them
to move or sleep or talk.

Not always with movement,
in ways I want to count on,
am I able to be content
with my body.

I tempt fate if I say I am well,
because like the weather,
it could change
to a tornado in a moment.

Rushing over me,
wind and hailstorm,
my body swirling and moving,
and not stopping for a breath.

My battle in the war of my health

27 Jun 2007

I am moving out of
the fog called ill-health;
it feels like returning
from a war zone.

I listened in spite of the bombs
in my head exploding.
I heard my friend remind me
to listen to my body.

He shared the soldier's story
of the battle within;
he gave me the gift
of telling me his tale.

And I gained hope
to control my own body,
in the war of my health.

My brush with death

10 Sep 2008

My head was spinning
and I hit the floor.
My Gerry tried to catch me
on my way down.
My glasses shattered
and I lay trembling and in blood.

Kind people came and helped me
as I was put in a mobile medical unit
like a moving hospital.
The motion soothed me, rocked me,
and I was not going to struggle.

Into the hospital I was wheeled.
Lights glared, voices heard, around me.
No fight; just resigned to give in.

I awoke to dogs, mother, father,
and a numbness in my face.

Getting home and getting better
is the way to go now.
My face is frightening
and I shall not look.

My good health

4 Mar 2009

I am enjoying good health these days.
My health is always on my mind;
My mind is always affected by my health.

In my mind, health and mind
are like cause and effect.
I do not know where
one begins and one ends.
But it feels like
sunshine to my brain cells,
when it is all working in harmony.

I hope it will last—
this breathing space of good health
It is my chance to be with others
in a place of balance and strength.

S-T can unlock my frozen body
and bridge the gap
between stuck and silent
and fluid and articulate.

Andrew the runner, man of peace

16 Oct 2009

Running is a way for me to go with my feelings.
I think it helps clear my head for good thinking.
Yes, running is an avenue to freedom for me.
It is a great way to connect with new people,
and that connects me with myself more as well.
I feel like Andrew who runs,
not Andrew who is an autistic man.

I am free from the stress
of the sounds of home
and the hum of the world.
I just feel the sounds
of my own body and spirit.
Running is peaceful and calming for me.

I can free myself from all worries
and just run towards
the lightness of feeling
close to nature and God.

I feel a sense of being freed
from all things that restrict me.
I am running to me.
I feel so much better as a person
with the ropes of autism broken from me.

I am Andrew the runner.
I am Andrew who has hopes and dreams.
Andrew the runner,
now closer to being free and just me.

I am feeling inspired to share this
with my Bridges friends,
so they can also be free from the ropes,
and just be who God intended
them to be---themselves.
I think then people will accept us more
if we accept ourselves.

Running gives me a sense of peace,
that you can only achieve
through loving yourself
and the wonderful creation you are.
I am running towards this person,
Andrew the runner.

I am Andrew the runner.
I love feeling this peace.
I can only run faster and harder
to find the runner in me.
Then I will be at peace.

I am Andrew the runner.
I want to run fast and furious.
I am challenging myself to be
a man of full potential,
and that includes my peace.

I am running to me.
I am Andrew the runner.

I am a runner

18 Feb 2011

I am able to run.
I am on my way to new things.
I feel the confidence in my steps.
I feel the air on my face
bringing me new life and breath.
I need these new ideas to feel alive.

When I run I am going someplace.
I am feeling exhausted and
refreshed at the same time,
releasing my energy and
feeling full of enthusiasm.

It is a way to express myself
without support
and I am in control.
A gentle reminder and call
from a fellow runner
gives me the nudge to keep going.

I run to feel my freedom
and I feel able to do what I need to.
I run to get someplace
to feel I can.

I am on my way to new things.
I run to get there.
I get there fast.
I feel full of peace upon my return.
I am a runner!

Yukon the youthful one

11 Nov 2009

Yukon came into my life
with energy and exuberance of youth.
He is full of life.
He brings me to a place of moving forward.
When I need him to ground me,
it is as if he knows.
He lies at my feet or next to me,
and I know I am connected
to the here and now.

He is loving and accepted by Amy
who is my history.
He is guided by her example
to watch over my future.
I am grateful to him for his presence
and the comfort he gives me.
With Amy or Yukon in my life,
I am never alone.

Walking is a pleasure I treasure

24 Jun 2011

Walking is a chance to feel
the soft breeze and warm sun.
I share this with so many.

Walking gives me a compass for the day.
It gives me a feeling of knowing what to expect.
Sometimes it begins as a predictable day,
then turns into a surprise.
You are never going to know
what may come up along the path.
It may mean a change in the journey.

Walking gives me opportunity
to share my dogs with others.
Yukon and Amy enjoy the walks as much as I do.
I meet new people along the way.
I have learned my neighbours
are good people and not strangers.

Walking opens me up to a world of new things.
Every day birds and squirrels
bring my dogs pleasure.
It gives me pleasure to see them smile,
always by my side to guide
and strengthen my courage.

Walking lets me enjoy the beauty of our earth.
it is a way to breathe freely
with open air everywhere.
We can talk or be silent
as we listen to the communication
of the world around us.

Walking gives me places
to go and explore
with the people I love most
who enjoy the things I love most.

Walking is always a new journey
like a new day beginning.
you never know what will come in your path.
I see green and yellow
that guide me along the journey.
I know where to go and
that gives me good happy feelings.

Walking is a pleasure I treasure.

My Senses

Joy through my senses

17 Dec 2010

I feel the tingle in my head.
I feel the warmth in my hands.
I feel the strength of my thoughts.
I smell the sweetness of flowers.
I hear the calm encouraging voices.
I taste the flavours of favourite foods.
I am full of different sensations.
I feel them all come together.
I feel joyful when this works.
Like the tingle in my head
I feel the tingle in my heart.
I am feeling full of joy.
I am hopeful that
I am going to have more joy.

Colours people project

7 July 2010

I see you in your sea greenness
and you show me
you are open to me.
You are loving
and it makes me feel
accepted and calm.

If I am with a man who is closed
he is grey brown putty
and makes me want
to shut the door to my mind.

I see many shades around me.
I thought everyone did.
It is too bad for you
if you cannot see it.
It is something I have
and maybe makes up
for some things I don't.

Explosive colours of my mind

15 Oct 2010

My ideas and thoughts flow out of my fingertips.
I share my happy times as well as my sadness.

Colour comes out in many forms.
Colour is in the eye of the person enjoying the art.
Colour can be in a painting
or colour can be in my words.

I share my thoughts with you
as I share my ideas, hopes and dreams.
This is a glimpse into my head
if you like to see what is happening.
Feelings can be shown in smiles or frowns,
but I prefer a splash of paint
or a jumble of words
to share my feelings.

I cannot always share this when I choose,
but in time the words spill out from my head
like an explosive volcano.
Yes, like a volcano,
the colours erupt from my paintbrush,
guided by my fingertips.

Colourful things come out of my head
to share with others.
I think they are ideas and thoughts
but others view them as art.
This gives me joy
to share my colour with others.

My thoughts cannot be contained
as they need to be shared.
Just as a volcano erupts:
it may bring bad things out
but it is a wonderful work of art
just like my works of art
need to be coming out.

Please listen carefully,
because the colours may fade
and need more hues,
but the message is there:
I have something to share.
I love to create art
in paint and words.

It gives me joy to bring joy to others.
Belief in me means accepting my creations
just as they are--full of ideas and colour.
Colour can also be black and hidden
but there is an idea there to share.
Thank you for sharing my joy
through words and paint.

Autumn colours of hope

8 Oct 2010

Autumn brings a new season of colour.
-the colour red:
the vibrant fire and heat.
-the colour orange:
the vibrant flavour and warmth..
-the colour yellow:
the vibrant light and glow.
-the colour green.

The newness changes from birth to death.
Green is newness and hope,
Red, orange, yellow are the changes.
Changes bring death
with new hopes for future.

Colours of autumn bring changes
and hope for newness.
Autumn brings me hope for the future.
Changes are hard and difficult,
but I need change for growth.
Colour brings me hope.
Autumn is a season of hope.

Music makes me feel...

21 Jan 2011

Music makes me feel many different things:
it is flowing water or blowing winds.
It gives me energy.
It is always calming if soft but
loud music makes me scared and fearful.
Music shows me how to be different—
to show others my expressions on my face.

Music brings me happy thoughts.
Music makes me remember good things.
I remember Twinkle Twinkle Little Star
as my favourite in memories
of early life with my sister.

Music gives me feelings
that are good and warm.
I feel things that give me energy.
Music can also be sad,
Music can be different depending
on my mood and how I feel.

Music can be a place to go away.
It takes me out of my mind:
for a while I think about the music.
Yes it gaps the gap.
Music is a good thing for me.

Strengths and Blessings

My strengths

17 Oct 2007

I think my strengths
are in my willingness to try new things.
I like to host people in my home.
I have a lot to say and I am good at it.
I do nice things for others.
I am interested in the world,
close to home and far away.
I like to work for politicians
and the environment in my area.
I do work for others.

Exuberance

5 Nov 2010

I am feeling exuberant and full of joy.
It is a feeling of freedom and contentment.
It is also freedom to express myself,
and not be different:
just me,
Andrew,
I am me.
I am happy and proud of who I am.
Andrew the green man.
Exuberance and green are my best qualities.
I am full of joy for feeling this today.
It is very very good,
I hope I feel this all day.

My blessed life

18 Mar 2011

Many things have to happen
to make my life go.
I have family and friends
who are key in helping with this.
My determination, my success
depends on my hope in my future.

I have interests which are many:
Gardening and the environment green.
Music and playing my song.
Sharing with others
my art and colour
through paint and words.

I am in need of encouragers
who give me the push I need.
Those people are my blessings
and I am thankful for their patience.
They listen and believe in me.
My words are real and important
and they act on these.

Your blessings multiply with
attitude gardened with love.
A positive attitude comes
from positive people
who grow with love.
Words of importance are
no good if not heard.
My health and good life
depend on my good attitude.

My life is blessed with many
who believe in me
and this gives me hope
for more blessings.
My life is a blessing
-thanks to all of you.

About interdependence

5 Sep 2007

I like to say things straight unless in a poem.
I rely on my friends to be upbeat and focused.
My friends look to me to be kind, wise
and, when I can, upbeat too.

For Bridges, I invite people to gather together
so I am like a facilitator. I like to lead
but I need to figure out things about myself first.
I have learned that my community
needs pretty much what I need too.

The people in my life get joy from my happiness.
Some of my friends see me as their teacher
about autism, diet, movement and communication.
I have learned to do many things
which I like to share with them.

Bridges of hope

22 Oct 2010

Hope comes in the thoughts
you allow yourself to dream.
It cannot always be a smooth ride
but the journey is always
one of new experience,
and with hope the bridges
can be ungapped
like the gap is filled.

Hope has gaps sometimes
but bridges join these hopes
to make dreams alive.
Hope is unlimited
with light to bring it alive
like the sun does for us.

I am hopeful that the people
who thrive on hope from this
will bridge us with our differences
so that others can share
in the same hope we have for ourselves.
I am a hopeful soul.
I am bridging myself with others
to give my hope life.

Friends in my life are stitches in a shawl
that goes on and on and wraps around

14 Jan 2011

You are knitting things together,
stitch by stitch, just like my life.
It comes together,
one dream connected to another.
If you make a mistake you begin again.
It is important to try and keep
a focus on the end dream.
Without many stitches
we can come apart.

We are each part of the dream
and each very important
to bring it all together.
With different ideas and thoughts,
I bring a piece of work to completion.
One idea, no matter how strange,
is worth the effort of time
and energy that fuel the thoughts.
Support and assistance
bring the stitches together.

One time I felt the stitches were too loose
but now they are strong and bound.
My life now is full of good things
that I determine myself.
Good supporters believe in me and
allow me to express the dreams for myself,
through communication activities
and everyday enjoyment.

Each thing is like a stitch
that brings my life together.
I have a good sense of who I am,
and that gives me hope
my life won't unravel,
if I think the stitches
are strongly put together,
and it is a well structured dream.

Peace will come to me

5 Feb 2010

Peace is a feeling of contentment:
I need more peace.
Peace is important to me:
I need more peace.
Strength I receive from God.
I wonder if God knows my turmoil.
I need more peace.

Ambitions and accomplishments give me joy.
Peace comes from the strength of God.
I know he wants peace for me.
I resist him with my thoughts.
Peace can only come
if I surrender all of me.
Peace will come to me.
I need to accept me for me.

Peace will come to me
if I love myself
like God loves me.
Peace can be mine
if I receive that gift.
I am at peace.

Yes, I am at peace,
just not showing it.
I am just struggling with who I am.
I need to accept me.
I know I am loved.
I am at peace.

Peace is contentment and joy

12 Nov 2010

Peace is a wish we all have.
Peace for me is my abilities --
to see them used.
Peace is not easy to feel all the time.
I long for peace in my world.

I feel peace when
I am surrounded by
those who love and respect me.
Peace is contentment
and joy in my life.
I feel this when I fulfill my dreams.

Some peace is in waiting
I need to be patient and
persevere through the struggles.

Peace is coming.
Peace is a feeling of joy.
I am pursuing my dreams
in hopes for more peace in my life.
This is my wish for all: Peace.

I am in this world,
but so busy trying to
keep it working for myself,
it is hard to consider outside my own world,
I wish everyone had peace in their life.

We need to have our own peace
before the world can be at peace .
I think we all can have it
but we need some peace from others
to experience a good full life.

I think it could be boring
to be at peace all the time.
We need change and some struggles to grow.
I feel unwell sometimes
and things change that I don't like
but I get through.

I prefer being joyful but
it is always being worked on.
I want peace for myself
and others' peace is also joy to me.

I have peace today.
I think our family is at peace.
Peace is a goal I want to add
to my dreams for myself.

My life, my train

15 Apr 2011

My life has been a big journey for all of us,
on the way to even better places
that will lead us to better things.

Trains travel over bridges.
This reminds me of my life:
I just keep going.
Sometimes I need repairs and rest;
then I keep on, on my journey,
crossing over new bridges.

Maybe I am more similar to the train than I realize.
My life is engineered and conducted by me.
I feel life brings some bumps along the way
This means more work.

My life is always interesting.
A train on the way to good places.
I feel blessed to have things in my life
that give me experience,
even though it means hard work.
I feel good about where I have been
and hopeful about where I am going.

A little piece of gravel can get us off track,
but gravel can also pave the way for smooth travel.
Lots of people in my life,
doing different things,
help me make it happen.

Trains are noisy but important.
They are in a place that is needed.
Trains run in a track with direction:
without this track they would go
off course--just like life.
I need some direction,
like how I arrange my things
to make sense for me.

I love my life:
it is full of trains that travel over bridges.
I make up a different kind of train
each time I try something
so it is like a traveling of trains
throughout my life.
Sometimes it doesn't go anywhere.
and I have to backup.

I love trains:
I think I always have.

Caring for My Environment

My thoughts about gardens

25 Jul 2007

I like the summer
except when the air is hard to breathe.
I like the fun and freedom.

I think the Enabling Garden
has good energy feelings.
I like to walk there every day
because it is lovely to look at.
I like the structure of paths and walkways,
as it is very hard for me
to stand still and keep my balance.
I need to keep moving,
and the paths and hedges keep me anchored,
as my dogs do too.
I am drawn to the water's edge naturally.
I like gardens
because they are peaceful to walk in.

My perfect garden would have
the green leaves of plants
and the colours of flowers,
but I don't much like the red.
I like the fragrances of gardens.
Nothing bothers me there.

When the weather is nice

23 May 2007

I feel my spirits
soar like the birds.
Like floating clouds
I drift along

When the weather is nice,
my own clouds clear.
I hope for
sunny days
and cool nights,
so I can feel nice weather
inside and out.

Sunshine makes me smile

5 Mar 2010

[the day after a grand mal seizure]

Sunshine brings me a smile.
Sunshine warms my face.
Sunshine gives me strength.
Sunshine provides a light.
Sunshine gives me hope.
Sunshine warms my heart.
Sunshine builds my confidence.
Sunshine provides a path.
Sunshine gives me peace.
Sunshine is a blessing.
Sunshine makes me smile.

Blessings on the land

4 Jun 2008

Blessings we receive
with loving our land:
Our land also receives
blessings from us loving it.

I feel connected to the planet
When I work in my garden.
My garden needs my attention
And I need what the garden gives us.
My garden gives us flowering plants
to please our eyes and nose,
and herbs to please our tongues.

I think I need the sense of peace
the garden gives me, the gardener.

Ode to autumn

24 Sep 2008

I love autumn.
My body loves it too.

My mind is clear
as the breeze
that blows the leaves
down to the ground.

My eyes love the sights
as the colours change.
My ears look forward
to hearing the leaves
crunch and crinkle
under my feet.

My mind remembers
that in the fall
we eat squash and pumpkins.

In the autumn, I am glad
of the break from hot summer.
My feet are planted in this season
and I hope I can hold on to it.

Why I love winter

4 Mar 2011

I love winter
for the cold air and snow
that covers the ground.

Winter is full of preparations.
It gets the ground ready.
I love winter's cold days.

Winter is refreshing and inviting to the mind.
Winter is getting complaints from many:
how we need warmth and to clear paths.

Winter we need for the earth to be fed:
it is getting the beds ready.
Plants will come through
once the white blanket is removed.

Winter prepares me for the brutal heat to come.
It prepares my mind for cooler days ahead.

Winter is clean and fresh:
it gives me a zest for my energy,
energy to keep going.

Winter is the beginning of the new year
and welcomes new things to come.
I love winter.

Seasons changing

4 Jun 2010

Seasons are a work in progress.
Seasons are unpredictable
and ever changing.

Life is also unpredictable like seasons.
It is expected and welcome,
but never certain what will unfold.

Seasons are a gift
just like my life.
Seasons give us
new things and growth,
but as life changes
so do the seasons.

Seasons are brief
but full of potential for their time.
Seasons bring new life
and new opportunities,
but change puts a
new experience in place.

Seasons are like our relationships:
they are ever changing and
dependable at same time.
Seasons bring new life to old,
just like life.
Seasons are ever changing.

I am a new seed of hope

20 May 2011

I plant the ideas for new things.
Sunlight comes from those
who give me love and support
to make the ideas come alive.
My watering is the kindness
of those around me.
The tending to my garden
is like my tending to my life.
I need to work at it every day.

Some things don't grow:
this means I start over;
then I need to consider new ways.
The weeds in my garden add life
but are not needed.
I may need to try again
or get rid of it.
It is part of the garden
but not a plant of substance.

Sometimes new ideas in my life
are like weeds:
they add colour and life
but are not necessary for my enjoyment.
The plants that do well are
those with purpose for my life,
not just part of the garden.

My life needs growth that comes
with sun and water and care.
My life is like a garden—full of green.
new things with colour, energy
and the seeds of hope.
I am growing every day
with new hope
for the best of the green.

Why I love green

17 Dec 2010

Plants add life to my home
and inspire my interest in green.
I love the colour but also
the freshness of green.
The colour is natural and real.
It is calming and comforting.
It adds the spice of things to foods
and flavour to my eyes.

Plants provide nourishment to our body
but our eyes reveal
the enjoyment of the colour.
I feel closer to the land
when I feel the soil in my fingers
that brings life to the seeds
I plant and care for.
I see how the seeds take root
and form the new life of a plant.

It is like myself:
I take time and care
then my life forms.
Just like a plant
I turn into a new thing every day.
I think that is why
I love the colour green.

I think of green as
new beginnings and hope.
Every day I need
to plant myself in the day
and your care and support
are like watering me.
I am inspired every day
to grow and gap the bridges in my life.

Each new day I have
a new bridge to cross
and if they don't all connect
I can fall through the gaps.
Talking to get my thoughts
out of my head
gaps the fears I have
of not being able to use my voice
and express myself.
It fills in the space
and connects me to the next bridge.

My Communities

Canadian Reign

4 May 2011

My fellow Canadians,
you do make me wonder.
So complicated, so polite,
so angry and confused.
Like a man with multiple personalities
you have given messages
from both sides of your mouth.

I cannot comprehend
how we cannot take the spaces in parliament
from those who cannot inspire us,
but give reins to the reign of a new Tory machine.

I know some will be surprised
that I know the difference
between a liberal and a rightist,
a minority or a majority.
But I listen while the world watches,
and I know we are in for a bumpy ride.

Guelph is my Garden of Eden

15 Jun 2011

Guelph and I reside within each other.
We are green and we are community.

Guelph is my garden
where I have grown from boy to man,
where I have learned to grow as a citizen,
where I have learned to grow my connections
with my neighbours.

Guelph grows too,
greener and more homes
housing growing families.

I have planted seeds here,
in my backyard and my front garden.
When I talk with others
I like to think I am planting
different kinds of seeds around Guelph.

I am planting ideas
about abilities rather than disabilities,
that people who are different
can plant in Guelph's garden too.

We are the plants in Guelph's garden,
we sink roots and grow fragrant
or even smelly flowers.
But we are all part of my Garden of Eden
we know as Guelph.

Spirit Valley Farm

7 Apr 2010

Sadder than words can convey
with the news that this special place
is going to be with us no longer.

Words cannot convey how I love it
like you love a person.
I love her welcoming me with rolling hills
that are open like arms I walk into.
I love her family
and how we joined together there
to work and play.

I love the memories of working
with K in the barn and the paddock.
We were in harmony
with the farm and the horses and each other.
Working in the woods
I accomplished things I never dreamed of doing.

My memories go before my time working with K
back to my younger years
when it was one place
where my words emerged.

Spirit Valley Farm is more than a place:
it is refuge
haven
home
work-space
breathing-place
farm.

My hope for Bridges

5 Nov 2010

I am an eager soul.
I am in search of help for others.
I am seeking a refuge of a home,
a place to find help
for the questions we have.
I want others to understand
and appreciate us.
I want to have a place of education
and support for who we are,
a bridge that never ends.

The gap gets larger
if the information isn't given to others.
The bridge needs to offer a steadfast hold
on hope for our futures.
My hope is in the faith
of those who believe in us.
They will support us through the journey.

The bridge is continuing to grow.
I feel full of hope.
I am hopeful for our Bridges future.
It is a journey I never thought
would end up here, or get so far.
I am happy to have it keep growing.
I can't believe it continues to be a strong force.
Though I never expected so much,
that makes me all the more happy and hopeful.

Bridges is my love for others and myself:
Bridges is hope.

Song of hope for Bridges

3 Nov 2010

We are many and we are one.
The bridges that connect us are
our minds and bodies,
that others sometimes
find hard to accept.

Together we find acceptance.
Together we find hope.
Together we find community.

We are many and we are one.
The bridges that connect us are
our words and our feelings,
though they flow
from our fingertips
and not our lips.

Together we find acceptance.
Together we find hope.
Together we find community.

We are many and we are one
The bridges that connect us are
our family and friends,
who facilitate our interactions
with each other and the world.

Together we <u>are</u> acceptance.
Together we <u>are</u> hope.
Together we <u>are</u> community.

My Hopes and Dreams

Hope for a future

10 Dec 2010

I am feeling a sense
of joy and fulfillment.
I am seeing my dreams come to life.
I know life has ups and downs
and this can be hard for me.
I need to work hard and
people need to be patient.
I am a man who needs
time and open mindedness.

I am learning every day:
Sometimes I learn life is difficult.
I am willing to persevere
and I will find my way.
I am learning that good things come
with hard work and practice.
I am getting there and
my mind is to be positive.
I am a man with dreams
and these are now real.
I have hope for my future.
I am hopeful.

Dreaming beyond boundaries

24 Mar 2010

Dreaming beyond boundaries
is like running with no limitations,
unfettered, unencumbered.
It is freedom to go
beyond where I have been before,
beyond where I was believed
to be capable of going.

Dreaming beyond boundaries
is dreaming the impossible
and making it possible.

Come with me friends.
Dream with me friends.
Believe in making our dreams come true.

When you are a dreamer
no one takes you seriously.
Nice idea they say,
but don't believe you mean it.
I wonder if dreamers
ever do what they imagine,
unless others dream the same dreams.

Believe me and help me
make my dreams become a reality.
I will keep dreaming,
if you drive the car that takes it
from my mind to the real world.

Dreaming is a feeling of freedom

1 May 2010

Dreaming has no limitations.
It is a feeling of freedom
that allows the spirit within
to soar like an eagle.
No boundaries.

It gives me a sense of determination
to set goals for myself,
to cross the bridge
without the barriers.
I feel at peace when
I take myself on a new quest.
It is a journey that has no limitations.

Dreaming is my quest for accomplishments.
Dreaming is freedom from myself and others.
Dreaming gives me control of my life entirely.
Dreaming is a feeling of freedom.
I am an eagle soaring in search of peace.

Being a dreamer

12 May 2010

When you are a dreamer
no one takes you seriously.
Nice idea they say,
but don't believe you mean it.
I wonder if dreamers
ever do what they imagine,
unless others dream the same dreams.

Believe me and help me
make my dreams become a reality.
I will keep dreaming,
if you drive the car that takes it
from my mind to the real world.

Dreaming big

21 May 2010

It is out of bounds thinking.
It is going beyond what I am able to do,
but I plan to overcome those boundaries.
I have many dreams that are only that.

Dreaming big offers me a chance
to go to a hopeful place.
I have hopes for many things
that are not always realistic
but I can hope and dream.

I dream big.
I am learning to be more hopeful.
I know dreams do come true with hard work.
I am dreaming for the Bridges centre
It will be a reality.
I am hopeful it will be great.
I am looking forward to new possibilities.
It is good to dream big.

I am in an exuberant dreaming mood.
I am so happy and peaceful.
I enjoy sharing so much--
it helps me dream.

I am a dreamer

7 Jan 2011

I want to tell you about my dreams:
I dream about others;
I dream of my future.
I dream with no limits:
the sky is clear
and the grass is green.

Everyone understands me:
others see a man with
no further worry or fears.
I am free and joyful all the time.
This is a peaceful place.

I dream big and open to new things.
Life is good and the best is always better.
I dream this for each of us.
I am a dreamer.

Impatient thinker

17 Nov 2010

I get impatient sometimes:
being a thinker can get tiresome.
The thinking is a good thing
but the doing takes us places.

I know it takes a thinker
to move others to action.
I know it takes a thinker
to inspire others to move.

It's just sometimes I feel
that I can think and think
but may not be able
to make others take it to reality.

I wonder about partnership
and I wonder about responsibility.
Where does mine end
and yours begin?

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Inquiries about any of the items above may be addressed to Friends of Andrew Bloomfield, C/o Guelph Services for the Autistic, 16 Caribou Crescent, Guelph, ON N1E 1C9, Canada, or by email to ebloomfi@uoguelph.ca

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